



How To Create Eternal Life In Any Business

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What if I told you that there is a gold mine of new business that you're probably missing out on?

And what if I told you that these will be the easiest to find, most loyal, and highest grossing customers you will ever find?

These are what I call, your evergreen customers.

Your evergreen customers are the ones you already have. They are the ones who can provide eternal life, growth, and regeneration for your business.

In this day and age, too many companies ignore their evergreen customers and are squandering this most precious resource in the endless pursuit of new customers.

Of course the goal of every company is to grow. I'd be crazy to suggest otherwise. But in actuality, it's the loyal customers that are the beating heart of a great business, and it's the companies that ignore this, by placing greater emphasis on customer acquisition, will most likely to end up stalling their own growth.

Why are the loyal customers so often overlooked? A number of factors contribute to this backwards thinking, but it's almost always due the root cause is the instant gratification that comes from landing a new customer.

The thrill of the chase.

The satisfaction of the successful seduction.

In the marketing world, the common phrase often heard is, "*Acquisition is sexy and retention is boring!*"

It is easy to see how the addictive high of a new sale is sexy like a torrid weekend affair. However, it is the relationship building of existing customers, more like a true love relationship that creates the recipe for long-term success. This is a relationship that will survive long past the initial glitz and glamour of the pursuit, and will provide the greatest benefits over time.

With this understanding, we can see how wasteful it is when companies decide spend enormous amounts of time, energy, and money to attract new customers, but pay little attention to caring for and nurturing the customers they already have; customers that could have easily been cultivated into an evergreen revenue stream.

The Thing About Taking Tourists To Space

Unless you own a company that launches satellites into space or you build rockets to take tourists on intergalactic moon tours, the single most expensive activity for your business will be customer acquisition.

Regardless of changes in the economy or new communication tools, you can be sure that that fundamental truth will never change.

With this understanding, keeping customers should be a businesses' highest priority. What we find instead are marketing meetings that are held to discuss if an email should be sent at 10:34 a.m. on Tuesday or 11:43 a.m. on Wednesday. Then we find that precious resources are squandered deciding when is the right time to send a tweet, or if the headline should be red or blue. All of this is merely the minutia of modern marketing.

And while the Internet has made it infinitely easier to reach and attract potential customers, acquiring new customers is still the most expensive part of growing your business. Yet for most companies, putting any thought towards actually keeping those customers is usually an afterthought—*if we're lucky*.

What all of these companies seem to be missing is an enormous pile of gold buried within their existing customer base, just waiting to be mined.

It's a fact.

Evergreen customers buy again, and again, and again. They're far more valuable than the one-time sale from a new customer who's quickly lost.

They are more likely to refer new business to you.

Most importantly, the cost to keep an existing customer is multitudes less than finding a new one.

All too often, though, companies are willing to let their loyal customers fall through the cracks. They've already moved on, because marketing for new customers is more fun—it's sexier.

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The Dangers of a New Customer Focus

No one would disagree that growth is good. Most companies, however, don't understand how costly it is to have a narrow-minded focus on acquisition.

Additional time, effort, and money must be spent on sales and marketing efforts. If we looked deeper into the true cost of additional time, we would quickly find an enormous profit killer. That time could have been better spent deepening and strengthening relationships with existing customers.

Focusing merely on new customer acquisition, as a way to grow a company, is a wasteful, myopic, and arrogant business strategy. Unfortunately, it's one that is followed and embraced all too often.

The Three Tenants of an Evergreen Business

For your company survive, thrive, and move forward in our rapidly changing economy, it must embrace *the three Cs of an evergreen business: Character, Community, and Content*.

To achieve success and learn how to create customers for life, these three tenants of an Evergreen Business must be adopted. They will provide a simplistic and strategic framework that will help your company rise above the noise, in a world obsessed with instant gratification, and resonate with customers who want a high-tech, high touch relationship.

The first C: Principle of Character | Character is the first thing that comes to the customer's mind when they think about your business.

In their classic book, *Positioning*, Al Reis and Jack Trout demonstrated that most people would only remember a few things about you or your company. The key takeaway is that you could either decide what those few key things will be or let the market decide. Incredibly, most companies leave this important perception up to chance.

Simon Sinek said that the conversation really must "*Start with Why.*" Simon was right. Yet so many companies mistakenly focus on the "*what.*" They're obsessed with what they make, what they sell, or what they provide.

In other words, you need to decide the most important things you want people to associate with you and actively work to ensure that those are things that instantly spring to mind when someone thinks about your company.

With high connectivity, noise overload, and instant access to information, conveying your brand's character in a way that resonates with your ideal customers is even more important than ever.

To help put all of this in context, imagine the sales office at the *Wall Street Journal*. A young sales manager intent on making his mark vows to sign up 10,000 new customers to sign up, and orders celebrity gossip stories to cover half the front page.

Tweens flock to the *Journal*, snatching up copies and reading them over lattes. The sales manager has succeeded wildly, 15,000 new customers! He's better than he thought.

Now imagine this scenario from the perspective of a longtime subscriber. You sit down for coffee with today's copy, only to find the front page riddled with celebrity scandal, *Jersey Shore*, and weight-loss supplements.

You would feel abandoned. Your trust is broken. The loyalty they worked so hard to build— simply thrown away!

You may think this is just a silly example, but in reality, this same story is all too often repeated when a business believes the key to eternal growth is the endless pursuit of new customers.

The *Wall Street Journal* is known for the character of their work. They strive to deliver the highest quality business reporting, and that characteristic is well known. They have carefully crafted this image and work constantly to maintain it.

Amazon also understands the principle of Character.

Several times a year, CEO Jeff Bezos will post a personalized letter on the front page of Amazon.com. By doing this, Amazon is crafting the image they want customers to have of them and demonstrating their character in a way that resonates with their ideal customer.

Bezos knows that a key to growth is staying connected with valuable evergreen customers.

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Much like the *Journal* stays true to its character and to its existing client base, Bezos is helping to build a set of expectations about Amazon by engaging customers through its character. He's using a mechanism that allows him to communicate almost personally with millions of users, to constantly drill home the points that he wants them to always have at the top of their minds about Amazon.

If the world's largest online retailer can do it, why can't your company?

The Second C: Principle of Community | In 2012, at a time when most newspapers were shutting their doors, Warren Buffet spent \$142 million to buy General Inc., a publisher with ownership of over 63 daily and weekly local newspapers.

When the Oracle of Omaha addressed Berkshire Hathaway shareholders, he said, *"I think there is a future for newspapers that exist in an area where there is a sense of community."*

Buffet recognized that many small town local newspapers still embraced the feeling of community. Many of them are still thriving because strong roots and bonds are still deeply ingrained and holding these communities together.

Think about the bonds formed in small towns, theatre groups, recreational sports teams, or in small community-supported schools. These are all mini-communities within the larger community.

Humans, by nature, are prone to seek out others who share similar interests, values, and beliefs. But as the world continues to drive us farther from these personal connections, it is harder and harder to find that sense of being part of a larger whole.

We know that today's technologies give us a greater ability to be connected, yet far too often people sit across the table from one another at a restaurant, engaging with someone far away on the other end of their device.

It's also much more common than ever before to relocate for work, to change jobs multiple times, and to travel. All of this leads to us putting fewer roots in the ground. The rise of individuality and the technology enabling it has been beneficial in many ways, but it has also driven us farther and farther away from our social and communal roots.

Few feelings are more powerful than a strong sense of belonging. The irony is that as while technology gives us more freedom and expression, it becomes easier to feel alienated and alone.

Creating and leveraging a sense of community is where the world's top organizations shine. Early on they recognize this, and they create a strong sense of community to which members can attach themselves. They allow people to identify with a group in an "*us vs. them*" framework. Customers don't just connect with the character; they become part of the community.

There is an awesome juxtaposition occurring on the web and in our increasingly connected world. In one sense, it has alienated us. We're wired in 24/7, and yet many of us feel more alone and estranged than ever before. On the other hand, organizations that recognize the need to connect with others who share similar interests, beliefs, and values have thrived.

Ironically, the Internet and the rise of mobile have connected us while simultaneously disconnecting us. It is more likely for customers today to feel isolated, it is the companies that recognize this need for connection and that create the structures promoting internal communities to form that will have a significant advantage over their competitors.

Some of the major benefits of building your community include:

- An Increased Customer Value
- More Effective Referral Generation
- A Better Understand Of The "Voice of The Customer"
- Improved Customer Service & Support
- An Increasingly Customer-Focused Culture

The third C: Principle of Content | At the most basic level, the core of any business is its *content*.

Content is “what” you do. It’s what you give or provide in exchange for money.

Most companies get confused how to manage and develop their content, and sometimes end of up missing the mark entirely.

A barber’s content is the haircut he provides. For *The New York Times*, it’s information. For a human resources consultant, it is solving an employee attrition problem. It’s the steel leaving the manufacturing plant, the truck that delivers it, and the company that loads it onto the freighter.

The challenge for most of us in business is understanding that what you provide is usually secondary to how you provide it. It is the experience and feeling you create for your customer that really matters.

Many organizations never have the opportunity to build evergreen relationships because they’re too focused on what they do. Instead, they should be asking themselves they can improve the experience to make it more emotionally engaging?

In 1960, an American Economist and Harvard Business Professor, Dr. Theodore Levitt published an article called “Marketing Myopia.”

In it, Levitt suggested that many companies had experienced decline or even extinction because they didn't understand what their customers were actually buying from them.

He explained that most companies mistakenly believed that their product was the main reason for their success and existence.

This unclear focus prevented them from truly understanding why they were in business. They never asked the question of what was it their customers truly wanted from them.

Levitt's primary example was the railroad business.

For almost a century, it had been a booming industry. Then it suddenly found itself in serious trouble when people realized they could get around in cars.

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Levitt said the decline was because industry executives assumed they were in the railroad business. They were wrong.

Levitt believed they would have continued to thrive and remain competitive had they understood they were in the transportation business.

It is a concept with which many companies still struggle today.

Many believe that whatever it is they offer in exchange for money is the most important component of their success, when in actuality it could be something entirely different.

An example would be grandma's meatballs. As a kid you may remember those delicious spaghetti dinners and how perfectly those tender, spicy meatballs complemented her home made sauce. If she gave you her recipe, you might think you can start a meatball business because you believe that what makes them great is just their taste. What you've missed is that what you were actually enjoying was not her special blend of spices, but the entire experience. Smelling the sauces, hearing the meat sizzle, her carefully preparing your plate and putting it in front of you.

Ultimately, you can reproduce the recipe, but you'll never be able to replicate the experience.

This is very common with restaurants—a business with a relatively high failure rate. Many of which wrongly think they are in the food business. They would be surprised to learn they are not in the food business at all.

The difference that sets successful, world-renowned restaurants apart is that they understand they are actually in the business of creating experiences.

From this we can see that instead of changing your content and focusing on your product, it is more important to understand what your customers find valuable about your business, and focus on improving the how and why. Those are the real reasons your customers buy from you.

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Sow The Seeds Now Before It's Too Late

In his famous speech, “Acres of Diamonds,” first published in 1890, Russell Conwell suggested that people tend to look everywhere for new opportunities, increased happiness, or new sources of business/customers. Everywhere, that is, except the most obvious place—right in front of them. The place they are most likely to find it. Many companies are focus on looking for greener pastures, when in fact they're already sitting on acres of diamonds.

This endless search is an addiction, and I've witnessed it with my own eyes in dozens of companies. The new customer addiction has cost companies unfathomable quantities of time, energy, and money.

But any company, no matter how big or small, can thrive on and create everlasting growth.

The fact is, even the tools we rely on today like Facebook and Twitter will one day be competing against new technologies. Every day there is a new tool or platform designed to help us poke, pin, jab, or tweet, with the hopes we might just poke someone hard enough to spend some money.

Next year there will be a dozen more.

Meanwhile, customers who have stuck with you will wonder, “what about me?”

With proper focus, a company of any size can thrive on and create everlasting growth.

Adopting a marketing approach that balances acquiring with as much focused on keeping customers, will help keep your evergreen customers happier, and will make your business healthier and stronger for years to come.

The lesson is simple. You will always need new customers, and there is a thrill with getting them. But if you use the principles of Character, Community, and Content, you will unleash the amazing potential of your greatest asset; your existing, loyal, loving customers.

With these principles, you can become *Evergreen* and enjoy more success, happiness, and connection with your customers than you ever dreamed possible.

What are you waiting for?

Go!

Your forest needs tending. 🌲

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Noah Fleming is a strategic marketing expert who teaches companies how to maximize their profits from every customer interaction; dramatically improve marketing effectiveness; and create unbreakable customer loyalty. He has provided coaching and consulting for thousands of business owners, executives, and individuals. To keep up online, visit noahfleming.com.

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