

AN ONWORDS & UPWORDS EBOOK

Small Business Communications For The Real World



**A Mercifully Short, Very Practical Overview
On How Good Communications
Can Benefit Your New Or Growing Business**

by Jim Murray

**ONWORDS
& UPWORDS**

CREATIVE
COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGEMENT



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~ PREFACE ~

Why I Decided To Write This Book

The failure rate among small business startups and small businesses in general is alarmingly high. Part of the reason for this is that the marketing and communications advice people are getting is:

- a) Bogus, (there's a lot of that out there)*
- b) Unnecessarily complex,*
- c) Not applicable to their business or*
- d) They are not getting any advice at all*

This book will hopefully help fill in some of the knowledge gap that business owners have when it comes to branding and marketing. It will also help them understand that this is not as complex a process as it is made out to be by a number of people in the coaching and consulting world.

Certainly it can become more complex as your business grows, but the theory is that your knowledge will be growing along with it.

It's important to learn to walk before you can run, as the saying goes. My professional passion lies in helping businesses get started on the right foot and have the resources they need to maintain a pattern of solid growth.

You won't find a whole lot of complex branding, marketing or communications theory in this book. What you will find is some very basic knowledge as well as some insight and opinion about what makes good communication and how to get it happening for your business.

NOTE: Strategic Communications planning is not to be confused with Business Planning, which is a whole other function that actually lays the foundation for the activities outlined in this e-book.



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Note: The opinions expressed in this mini ebook are my own. They are what I believe and a key part of the advice I give all my clients, large and small. You may disagree with certain points of view expressed here. But overall, my hope is that you find it to be useful information that, if employed, can help your business move forward. Because, at the end of the day, success is really the thing we are all trying to achieve.

~ INTRODUCTION ~

Who Am I To Be Advising You?

I have been in the communications business since 1972. I have worked in teeny tiny ad agencies and big giant ones as a copywriter, art director, broadcast producer and creative director. I have written screenplays for TV movie producers and lyrics for composers and jingle houses. I have also been a professional photographer, a journalist and TV reviewer.

Since 1989, when I started my own communications company, I have worked with small business startups, established small businesses in growth mode and even large corporations, as a strategic advisor and creative resource.

I was mentored by many of the pioneers of modern advertising and marketing, and soaked up all they had to teach me like a sponge. Oddly enough, a lot of that knowledge is still totally relevant today.

When I went on my own, I started doing business with people who were very smart and had lots of great ideas about their businesses but were not sophisticated marketers. (i.e. people like you, perhaps).

So I began translating all the complex knowledge I had accumulated about communications into simpler, common sense language. This, in turn, really helped my clients understand both what they needed to do to market their business effectively and what I could do to help them achieve that success.

In addition to the information and insight being provided here, this book is obviously a self-promotion tool. Hopefully it will be as useful for me I hope it is for you.

NOTE: As you read this book you will notice that it is very general in nature, but it was only intended to be an overview. Obviously, every type of business has a unique set of communications parameters, just as every company does. This is not a solution-based book. Its core purpose is to give you a general idea of the communications process and what to expect going forward. Hopefully, that will help you make smarter and more beneficial decisions.



~ CHAPTER 1 ~

Your First Mistake

The first mistake that a lot of small business owners make when it comes to marketing their own business is thinking that they know all there is to know about marketing their business.

The people who actually succeed at marketing their own business are the ones who admit that they know very little.

It's not anybody's fault that they think this way, especially if they are entrepreneurial souls. It's just the nature of the beast so to speak.

What is their fault, however, is that the assumptions they make can be adversely affected by their lack of communications experience and inherent subjectivity.

This is not good. So it's very important that you approach the marketing of and communications for your business with:

- a) A well-defined brand image,*
- b) A solid going forward strategy,*
- c) An arsenal of workable marketing tactics, and*
- d) The right suppliers, who have the kind of experience and skills to help you cost and time effectively get your communications off on the right foot and stay on track.*

Some of the suppliers* you will or could need to know about include:

- *Strategic/Creative Consultant*
- *Creative People*
- *Media Planner & Buyer*
- *Web Hosting Service*
- *Web Site Programmers*
- *Public/Media Relations Expert*
- *Specialists in Internet Marketing*
- *Search Engine Optimization & Social Media Marketing*

* See pages 16 & 17 for a description of these services



~ CHAPTER 2~

Avoiding Your First Mistake

A lot of small businesses plan their branding & marketing in a knowledge vacuum. Since they are not sure how to do it themselves they often look at their competitors and attempt to divine what they are doing by checking out their web sites and any advertising they might find. This is based on the assumption that your competitors actually know what they are doing, which is not always a wise thing to assume.

The key step in avoiding your first mistake is to find the right kind of strategic and creative help. This can come in a couple of forms. Individual strategic/creative consultants, strategic oriented design companies or small agencies.

The strategic/creative consultant is generally the most affordable. Because that person can help you create the right strategy and then, through their own skills and the skills of people in their network, be able to turn that strategy into the marketing tools you need to start building or rebuilding your brand and your business in a very cost effective way.

Most small business either cannot afford or are simply not willing to pay the kind of fees and markups charged by design companies and small agencies. Some businesses grow into the need for larger firms, but a lot of companies tend to stick with the more cost effective alternative, especially if they are getting the results they seek.

Which route you choose is going to depend on how much budget you plan to allocate to your communications. But getting help from someone who can bring professionalism, creativity, insight, experience, and most importantly, objectivity to the business of your communications is the key to making sure that your strategy is well put together and your program is cost and time effectively managed over the long run.



~ CHAPTER 3 ~

“Without A Strategy, You Ain’t Going Nowhere!”

Jerry Goodis

Once you have decided that it’s time to start planning your branding/
rebranding and communications you need to develop a strategy to help get
you there. The sane small business owner will hire a professional to help
them.

The strategy is not only a useful guide to getting your marketing program
started and moving forward, it’s also a very important information and
insight tool for whomever you choose to help you with your marketing.

On the next page, I have outlined the communications strategy I have used
for many of my clients. It’s based on the strategic model employed by Procter
and Gamble, a company I did a lot of work for back in my agency days and a
one you could call successful.

Again, it’s a simple, common sense tool that is actually a bit deceptive in
a way. The questions are all pretty basic, but at the same they force you to
think deeply about your business, your competitors, your audience, your
main benefit or Unique Selling Proposition, your competitive advantages
and the tone and manner of your communications, in whatever form they
ultimately take.

This is the first essential step towards building a powerful marketing program
that will help you grow your business.

It’s also designed to be fluid so that if you add capabilities, in the form of
new services or people, that benefit support can easily be incorporated into
your strategy and marketing materials.



~ CHAPTER 3A ~

The Communication Strategy Outline

This is a very basic outline. If you would like a more in depth explanation of this document, you can see it on my blog at:
<http://bit.ly/1jxYFYi>

BASIC INFORMATION

The nature of the product or service being offered.

OBJECTIVES

What the communication/marketing seeks to achieve.

MARKET SITUATION

How your business is currently positioned in the market.

OBSTACLES TO SALE/COMPETITION

Perceptual barriers that need to be broken down and competitors that need to be repositioned.

TARGET GROUP(S)

Who will be receiving this communication? What do we know or assume about them?

MAIN BENEFIT (USP)

The USP or Unique Selling Proposition of your businesses. Should answer the inevitable customer question, "What's really in it for me?"

BENEFIT SUPPORT (Product/Service Features)

The reasons why the main benefit is believable.

BRAND CHARACTER (Tone & Manner)

How the company should be personified for its audience.



~ CHAPTER 4 ~

Finding Good Help – The 80-20 Rule

When you are looking for suppliers to help you with your communications, you're going to run into a lot of people who talk a mean game but don't deliver so much.

About 80% of the people you talk to will fall into that category. This is just the way of the world, and you should know that the communications business is not any sort of exception to this rule.

Here are 5 questions you need to ask them. Listen carefully to their answers. They will tell you just about everything you need to know about their skills, their rates and their potential to be a solid, dedicated associate.

- 1. Tell me about your background and why you decided to start your own business.*
- 2. Tell me about your core skill sets and how your 'economies of scale' work.*
- 3. Tell me about a couple of the successes you have had with developing branding and marketing for small business.*
- 4. Tell me about how you are organized to service a business like mine, and the people who will help you do that.*
- 5. Tell me what you know and think, in general terms, about my business.*

It's very important to feel positive about each answer that you receive. Because the people you hire could be with you for a long time to come.



~ CHAPTER 5 ~

Your Company's Identity

Once you have your strategy devised and agreed to, the next step is to create the essential tools you will need to get started.

The only thing you need to remember about this process is that there is a hard way and an easy way to get this done.

The hard way is doing it yourself or working with someone who thinks they can create this material from the drawing board of a word processing program like Microsoft Word.

It's critically important that the people you work with to create this material have a good design and creative writing skills and a working knowledge of either Quark or Adobe desktop publishing software. This is so that everything you create can be properly colour separated and turned into material that can be used for printing or on the web.

The essential elements of your company identity include:

Logo & Positioning Line
Business Cards, Letterhead & Forms
Signage (Building, Office or Vehicle)
Services Brochure & Digital Company/Sales Presentation
Email Signature
Company Profile for Business and/or Social Media
Web Site with Blog

Anything beyond these essentials falls into the tactical side of your marketing program, which will be explained in the next chapter.

~ CHAPTER 6 ~

Moving Beyond The Basics

NOTE: This is a very general overview of what should actually be a process that is dictated by the specific needs of your business. As I said earlier, I'm trying to keep this very simple and basic.

A great deal of how you move forward beyond the basic communications materials you need depends strongly nature of your business and therefore, your target audiences.

Your target audience, be it a segment of the general public or a business to business sector, will dictate the tools that need to be employed in order to reach them effectively.

There are a great many of these tools out there, and new ones are popping up all the time. Your communications strategy, if it's done correctly, will help you identify your target audiences. After that, your decisions will fall into two main areas:

- 1. Traditional or off line marketing:** (print advertising, radio commercials, TV, sponsorships, public/media relations out of home media, direct mail marketing, branded merchandise, trade show marketing, etc),
- 2. Digital or online marketing** (emails, blogging, content management, newsletters, web site advertising, search engine optimization, pay per click, social media marketing etc.)

As you can easily assume, you could not afford nor would you have the time to do everything listed here. But then, again, your strategy and your communications advisor and the people in his/her network will help guide you to the tools most likely to create positive results for your business.



~ CHAPTER 7 ~

Your Most Important Communications Tool

There is a very strong argument you could make for this section to begin with ...Depending on the kind of business you have...implying that different types of businesses would necessarily have different most important tools. That may have been true a decade or so ago, but in today's business world, your most important communications tool is, hands down, your **web site**.

There are a number of good reasons why I say this:

- 1. Your web site** provides your prospects with the key information they need to know to feel confident doing business with you.
- 2. Your web site** is your most fluid medium, allowing you to add testimonials and information about new products or services or personnel, and actually, if necessary, sell on line.
- 3. Your web site** is your company's avatar. By going through it, your prospects will (or should) get a good impression about you and your business. Too many web sites today still look like they were created by grade three students. And if you don't believe that people judge you by the way your site looks and functions, you would be dead wrong. There have been a number of client surveys that point out that a company's web site and overall image design is one of their key considerations.
- 4. Your web site** is the link to your blog and business and social media pages (if your business needs them.)
- 5. Your web site** is part of how vendors and suppliers determine your viability as a potential customer. And you do need to know who is out there with products and services that you may need.
- 6. Your web site** and its supporting SEO (Search Engine Optimization), are how prospects find you on the Internet, which has, for a few years now been the most preferred search tool for both consumers and businesses.



~ CHAPTER 7 (2) ~

Your Most Important Communications Tool

Your web site is the most visible extension of your company and, besides your sales force, is probably the single most important communications investment you will make for your business. The investment you make in having a quality web site designed, written, programmed and optimized will pay dividends for many years to come.

5 Things That Will Make Your Website Work Hard For You

1. Having it designed and written by experienced creative people.

Most companies start the web design process in the wrong place, i.e. with a web design company. Web designers are seldom strategic thinkers, writers or even designers. They are programmers. A good web design always starts with strategically oriented creative people, who will design your site, figure out your navigation and create all the content, choose the right kind of program to support your web site and find you the best programming and hosting services, all in complete synergy with your brand identity.

2. Avoiding templated Wordpress style sites:

These sites are relatively easy to hack and generally tend to look like, well, pre-formatted sites. Your company identity can end up getting 'shoehorned' into the format and diminished in a substantial way.

3. Keeping site content short, simple and to the point.

A good, experienced writer knows and lives by this rule.

4. Making sure your navigation allows total freedom of movement.

The structure of your site is like the structure of a good story. Too many blind alleys or too many sub-menus can easily visitors to lose interest.

5. Investing in good SEO.

Search Engine Optimization is still the standard for rankings and searching on the main search engines. Finding and listening to a solid SEO person will be a high yield investment.



Top 4 Other Key Communications Tools

1. You: Nobody knows your business better than you do. Nobody cares about your business more than you do. Nobody is going to be more persuasive about selling your business than you (or your partners) are.

3 Things You Can Do To Be A Better You

1. Write a sales script or elevator message, memorize it, then practice it until it sounds effortless and confident.
2. Hire a performance coach to help you learn to relax when presenting your company to an audience
3. Record your presentation and play it back. You will learn a lot about how you come across that way.

2. Your Database: In today's digital world, electronic direct marketing for newsletters, dedicated emails, special offers and new releases etc, are a cost effective alternative to printed pieces and mailing costs, although these do have their place. But the key to making any kind of marketing possible is your database. How effectively you build it and how diligently you maintain it can make a huge difference to your business.

3. Your Business Card: This is still one on the most important tools in your toolbox, especially if you are in the services sector and do a lot personal networking or if you attend or participate in trade shows, conferences or events.

5 Things Your Business Card Should Have

1. A description of exactly what your business is about.
2. Complete and up-to-date contact information.
3. Design that is synergistic with your company's overall identity.
4. Typography that is easy to read.
5. A space for anyone you arrange a meeting with to write down the time and place.

Top 4 Other Key Communications Tools

4. Your Video: The cost of creating videos, if you know who to talk to, is considerably less than it was even a few years ago. Conversely, the value of video as a communications tool has increased substantially in the advent of business and social media marketing.

Of course, like most of the other communications tools at your disposal, it's important to be sure you know what you want to achieve with a video. And those objectives will vary depending on the nature of your business and where you ultimately end up placing it. And as I said previously, without a strategy you could end up with a very nice video that says all the wrong things. But telling your company story in this very powerful medium is always going to be a solid investment.

6 Ways A Good Company Video Can Work For You

1. You can upload it to a YouTube channel and have an online location for it.
2. You can incorporate it into your web site and/or blog.
3. You can email a link to your database or any new people you meet via networking or events.
4. You can use it as a preface or a leavebehind in new business pitches.
5. You can link to it via your profile on social and business media.
6. You can make it the centrepiece of your trade show presentation.

Video content is now as well recognized by the major search engines as static content. Video viewership numbers are on a steady incline. So if your business is into fishing where the fish are, then this is a very good lure to consider.

~ CHAPTER 9 ~

Your Suppliers & What They Do For You

There are a number of different people who, sooner or later, can get involved in your communications. All these people or companies operate under the combined guidance of you (or your marketing person), and the core person or people you hire to help you with your communications.

The Strategist: Is responsible for shaping the direction of your company, discovering what it is that is going to give you a competitive edge in the marketplace, and crafts the strategy which supports it.

The Creative Team: This is generally a writer and an art director or designer, but it can be one person with the skills to do both. That person could also even be a strategist as well. This team or individual is responsible for bringing your strategy to life in the form of a branded identity and a marketing/advertising/promotional program. They will create the materials and produce them. They will take the strategy and use it as a guide to tell your company story and devise a unique logo and positioning for your company. Then will then apply this identity across the board to any marketing activities that your strategy and budget would suggest.

The Web Programmer: Works with the creative team to create the web site, blog site and any other digital marketing tools you may require.

The Web Marketing Specialist: Works with strategist to create the right kind of supporting program or combination of programs to effectively reach the target audience on line. These programs are called: Search Engine Optimization, Content Management, Social Media Marketing & Pay Per Click. In its simplest form what the Web Marketing Specialist does is help you create the online environment, that brings the right customer to the right page and makes it easy for them to do the right thing.

The Media Person: Works with the strategist and creatives to determine how best to reach your target audience, through a wide or focused range of media, for advertising, promotion and sponsorship opportunities in both the on and offline worlds.



~ CHAPTER 9 (2) ~

Your Suppliers & What They Do For You

The PR Person: Works directly with you and the strategist to help you get your story out to both the online and offline media that are the most important influencers of people or companies in your target audiences. This person will be conversant with your business and connected to the editors and bloggers that can help you. Very few publications, consumer or trade actually accept unsolicited articles, so if this is a good tool for your business it would be extremely difficult if not impossible for you to get good ink without a PR person.

The Promotion Person: Works with the creative team and the strategist to devise product or service promotions, recommend and source branded merchandise and take care of any trade show needs you might have: i.e.: recommending trade shows to attend, sourcing booth suppliers, and getting deals on on-site and directory advertising.

The Video People: work with the creative people to create corporate, promotional and web based video. Working with scripts developed by the creative team they handle the entire production and post production. The core production team consists of a producer who oversees the production, a director, a camera person (who is often the director), a sound person and an editor. Size does count in the production area but not in the way you think. Smaller is better when it comes to smaller productions.

The Printer: Printers are generally chosen by the creative people, because they know who is going to do the best job on whatever it is that needs to be printed. There are printers who specialize in a number of different areas including labels, large format posters, trade show booth panels, larger newsletters and in-house publications, banners, signage, vehicle wraps etc.

There could certainly be more depending on the type and level of communications activity you undertake, but the types suppliers you see here are pretty much your core group.



~ CHAPTER 10 ~

Bringing It All Together

As you establish or grow your business, as the case may be, you will find that a well thought-out and practical communications strategy and a solid company identity will not just help you attract more of the kinds of customers or clients you want, but will also help you attract good suppliers and the quality personnel you need in order to keep things moving forward.

Here are, in my opinion, the three pillars upon which a good company identity and communications program are built.

1. Your Commitment: A lot of business owners believe that the power of their salesmanship is enough to get their business off the ground or to the next plateau. And that may have been true before the advent of the digital world. In today's marketing environment, your business needs to be firing on as many cylinders as you can afford to load. But before any of that can happen you have to believe it. You have to make the commitment to making it happen and find the most cost effective ways and creative ways to do that.

2. Your People: Finding the right key people to work with is critical. This person or team doesn't necessarily have to have experience in your business area. In fact, that actually can sometimes be an advantage. What you need to look for is chemistry. There are a lot of experienced communications people out there who can do a lot of different things. But if the chemistry is right, you will find that things like trust, faith and confidence are much easier to come by. And creative people always do their best work for the people with whom they feel best connected.

3. Your Direction: The majority of small businesses in any given market sector will have typical 'small business' identities, which means, pretty awful most of the time. The easiest way to differentiate yourself is develop your brand based on the business you would like to become. This may require a greater investment. But it will be worth it in the long run. The confidence that prospects will have in you is directly proportional to the confidence you have in yourself. And how you show it. In other words, if your company looks rinky dink, that's pretty much how you risk being treated.



~ CHAPTER 11 ~

I'm In The 'Helping' Business

I sincerely hope this little book has been useful to you in terms of getting a handle on the communications side of small business. I got into the communications business because at my core, I am a writer. The other skills I picked up were the direct result of the generosity of the people I worked with and for in the ad agency business and in the early part of my independent career when I did a lot of work with marketing strategists and strategic focused design companies.

Communications is not really complex. But it does require a certain amount of skill and persuasiveness. A lot of small business owners have the persuasiveness, but many lack the skill required to turn it into communication that's as effective as they are in live presentations.

Most people I know in the communications business are driven by the notion that if you do good work, you will always have lots of good work to do. They are fascinated with the puzzle that creating solid communications presents to them. It's a game, but it's not play. The stakes are real and the rewards are most gratifying. Helping a company get off on the right foot or get to the next level of their growth...helping shape that way forward and making sure that company has the tools it needs to look successful and actually succeed is one of the best jobs in the world.

When people ask me what business I am in, I instinctually reply that I am in the helping business. Because that's really the only way I have ever seen it. And a lot of strategic and creative people will tell you the same thing. We're there to help get things done and to help our clients make things happen, which will ultimately get them to where they need to go.

I wish you all the luck in the world with whatever is you are in business to achieve. Hopefully the advice in this book will make the road a little less rocky.

Jim Murray



~ EPILOGUE ~

About The Author

Jim Murray is the owner and sole proprietor of Onwords & Upwords Inc, an independent communications consultancy based in Toronto, Ontario.

Onwords & Upwords provides strategic focus, creative concepts, copywriting and editing, art direction and production in all media for small to medium sized clients wherever they may be.

If you're starting or rebranding a business, Onwords & Upwords is an affordable one stop resource that can help you create or re-invent your brand in a strategically focused and innovative way that will help you reach your customers and let them know that you are for real.

Jim has more than two decades of highly decorated ad agency experience and an equal amount of experience with direct clients. He is surprisingly modestly priced for the quality of creative service he provides.

Jim also has an excellent network of supplier services that make it possible for him to take on just about any type of communications project no matter how small or large the budget.

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| Case Studies: | http://bit.ly/VvrOed |

Small Business Project Summaries

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Peel Scrap Metal Recycling: | http://bit.ly/18hjqI7 |
| Interior Dimensions: | http://bit.ly/IbIFQ3 |
| Mastromonaco Photography: | http://bit.ly/1egT8UM |



~ EPILOGUE ~

Credibility From Two Perspectives

The Satisfied Customer Perspective

"I want to sincerely thank you for all your help in seeing us through an extensive overhaul of our corporate communications.

As you no doubt discovered early on in the process, embarking on this project involved a leap of faith on our part. Fortunately for us, your patience, expertise and exceptional creativity kept us fully engaged and the whole thing moving forward as we worked through the processes of branding, logo design, web site & advertising development.

We continue to receive very positive feedback and have no hesitation in recommending you to others."

*Jeff Shaffer, Co-Founder
Peel Scrap Metal Recycling Ltd*

The Agency Honcho Perspective

"I have worked with Jim in two major agencies, the last one being as his Creative Director in the international powerhouse, DMB&B.

He was always the best copywriter I had the pleasure to work with. His is a true Advertising Mind. He gets the strategy, the media, the politics and the budget.

If you can get him to work on your business, you've as good as got a top agency on your side."

*Pete Langmuir,
former National Creative Director
of DMB&B and Saatchi & Saatchi*

