

Making Your Customer *the Main Character of Your Story*

In his bestselling book *Blink*, author Malcolm Gladwell examines the surprising ways in which the decision-making process operates. *Blink* deals with the part of the brain that runs our rapid decision-making system. Or, in the author's words, the "system in which our brain reaches conclusions without immediately telling us that it's reaching conclusions."

The implications for business owners are profound. Despite all your efforts in making advertising and marketing appeals to customers/consumers based upon reason and logic – your high quality, advanced technology, impeccable service, and undisputed cool quotient – other under-the-radar factors are influencing their choices.

One chapter, for example, studies the strong preference that Fortune 500 companies show for hiring tall CEOs – who, according to a study cited in the book, average just under six feet tall. While Gladwell concludes that no one is consciously passed up for such a lofty position just because of being vertically challenged, we attribute positive leadership qualities to tall people because they fit our idea of what a leader is supposed to look like. Other attributes typically credited to tall people include strength and vitality.

Keeping this in your conscious mind, taking steps to help your business "stand tall" can enhance its stature in the perception of potential customers. Establishing a strong corporate identity provides an excellent foundation for shaping the impression you make upon the outside world. If you're an independent with one shop, set it up as the ultimate shop of its kind. Identify what makes it unique, and use that quality as the basis for all else, to be reinforced through every advertising and marketing effort.

Start by investing in professionally designed and printed business cards and letterhead stationary. The right logo, paper stock and colors can make Mom & Pop look like The Next Big Thing. Follow up by reexamining your advertising. Do your ads create the impression of leadership in your field, or do they only lead members of your target market to strongly suspect you have an in-law who dabbles in desktop publishing?

Make sure your new, improved ads get in front of the right audience with the right mix of trade and consumer publications, as well as local daily and weekly newspapers (if applicable). Effective media placement is a strategic approach that also enables you to take full advantage of value-added promotions that raise your business' profile.

If, after following these steps, you ask one of your new customers why he or she decided to do business with you, don't be surprised if they can't quite explain it – or say they just decided in the blink of an eye.

