

How can my small business grow faster?

THE MANSFIELD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

G R O W

Y O U R

B U S I N E S S

It isn't easy.



TIPS

GR
YOUR
BUSINESS

Here's how we can help you at the Chamber...

Whether owning your own business or you're running a business it is downright hard especially as fast as our world continues to change. You deserve to be supported. To have the resources you need to lead a successful and growing business.

We have many marketing venues including our website, social media and email marketing. We likely have a larger following than your business so any exposure the chamber gives to your business can be greatly beneficial. Bottom line it's all about connecting with your audience to build your brand, drive website traffic and **increase sales**.

Owning a small business isn't easy. It is one of the toughest challenges many face when they are looking to get out of the 9 - 5 daily grind.

The success of your small business depends on your efforts to grow profits using various methods. From employee training to marketing, every aspect of your business deserves attention.

Rapid growth doesn't happen overnight, but there are several steps you must take to keep your business moving forward. It takes time and effort.

However, when you start reaping the benefits, you will see that your effort is worth it. Here are some tips to consider if you wish to see your business grow.

LORI WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT / CEO

DID YOU KNOW ...



Approximately 543,000 new businesses are started each month. Which means you're going to have to create something a lot more original than that bathroom finders app.



Unleash the potential!



Start by defining your brand

Before you begin picking out brand colors and fonts, start by defining your brand in words by answering the following questions:

- What's your business' goal or mission?
- What benefits do your products or services offer customers?
- What problems do you solve for customers?

What three qualities do you want to be associated with your business?

All of your answers should be based around your target customer. There's no point in having a brand that appeals to tweens if your product is aimed at pensioners.

Spend some time researching the market. Which brands are out there that are already doing well in your space? What could you do to improve on what they are already doing? What about their branding stands out?

Once you've done your research and you've nailed down the definition of your brand, you can move on to the visuals of branding:

Create your brand messaging

What are the key messages you want your brand to communicate? What are your values? Write these down in the most simple format and ensure everyone working for you is familiar with the message. This might also include brand language and style to ensure that everyone speaking on behalf of your brand is using a consistent style.

Design a memorable logo

Find a graphic designer that fits your brand's potential aesthetic and get a simple, memorable logo created. Use no more than three primary brand colors to keep it clean.

Create branded templates

It's important to keep your branding consistent throughout your social channels, website, in-person events, etc. The easiest way to do this is with brand templates that can be used when creating promotional or social materials. For example, social media graphics, business card templates for employees, promotional brochures, welcome packs, etc.

Develop a tagline

This isn't mandatory, but if it fits with your branding and messaging, you might decide to create a tagline. This is another easy way to keep your business memorable for customers.

Keep it consistent

Customers appreciate consistency. Even though using the same colors and styles constantly might seem boring to you, customers are going to become more and more familiar with your brand the more consistent you are.

MARKETING

How can a strong brand help with selling in the age of social?

It will come as no surprise that 90% of top salespeople use social channels as sales tools. These platforms are the easiest way to connect with customers and establish your brand in your niche. But how exactly does having a strong brand help with selling in the social age?

Keeps your business relevant

When it comes to social media, brand loyalty is quickly diminishing. Customers are less likely to remain loyal to businesses they've bought from in the past, and more likely to shop with brands that are front of mind.

If you have a solid brand that is consistent throughout your social channels, you are more likely to remain front of mind with customers, helping to secure sales.

Helps your business remain memorable

Online platforms are saturated with brands all selling incredibly similar products. If you have a solid brand, customers are much more likely to remember your business and search for it when they need it. No matter how amazing your products are, if your brand isn't memorable, customers aren't going to spend hours trolling through their browser history trying to find you.

Establishes your business as trustworthy

Another downfall of the social age is the market being flooded with poor quality products. There are thousands of brands selling sub-par products, undercutting profit margins, and creating mistrust with customers. The beauty of solid branding is that your business stands out as a trustworthy entity. And customers are willing to spend more on brands that are seen as more trustworthy, which is another bonus in a crowded market.

Allows for organic marketing

With platforms like Instagram and TikTok allowing people to share every aspect of their lives, brands are becoming more and more reliant on organic marketing from consumers. Customers love sharing their experiences with products online and having a strong, memorable brand is going to make customers all the more likely to share it with the world.

MARKETING

Build a Sales Funnel

The first way to quickly grow your business is by building a sales funnel. If you don't have a sales funnel, you're making a monumental mistake. Sales funnels can help to automate your business. It helps you to scale and grow quickly and easily. Sure, there's some front-end work involved. Obviously. But, once those processes are in place, it's smooth sailing from there.

Maximize Social Media

Without a doubt, social media is a very powerful tool. It reaches out to hundreds upon thousands of people at once. Make sure your business is engaged in social media. This helps you stay relevant. Listening to people and reading their comments will give you an idea on how to make them feel more satisfied. You will also understand their behaviour and find a way to meet their demands. The best part is that you won't have to spend a lot of money just to attract new customers. You don't need to engage in comment wars though. Just keep it positive and make everyone feel that they are heard.

Use a Customer Management System

Manually tracking transactions is hard. No one wants to do that. It gets too cumbersome as the business grows. If you want to scale quickly, use a customer management system. There are plenty to choose from. But, it really depends on your line of work. Of course, cloud-based software like Salesforce is always a viable option.

Quickbooks can help you with the accounting. InfusionSoft can also assist with sales and marketing. There are plenty of CMS systems, most of which integrate with other cloud-based services. Find what works for you and utilize it.

Research and continue to research and gather information on your competition

Create a Customer Loyalty Program

Loyalty programs are great ways to increase sales. It costs up to three times more money to acquire new customers than it does to sell something to an existing customer. Other resources pin this number anywhere from four to 10 times more. However, any way that you slice it, acquiring new customers is expensive.



Focus on Professional Development

The success of your business also depends on the quality of employees that you hire. Building an effective team is the key to ensuring that your business prospers. One of the best ways to have motivated employees who work hard is to give them a sense of purpose. They should not just feel like they have to work for the sake of working. They want to belong to something bigger than themselves. They must understand the bigger goals. This is where branding comes in. Many mistakenly believe that branding is something you do to attract customers.

However, a powerful brand will also help you draw quality workers to your business. Your employees should also feel that they are heard. There are team-building activities that could help them perform well as individual employees and through collaborative tasks. You should also send them to training sessions and seminars so that they can improve on the current bank of knowledge that they already have.

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Look for New Opportunities

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Form Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships with the right companies can truly make a world of difference. It could allow you to reach a wide swath of customers quickly. Identifying those partnerships might be easier said than done. But, look out for companies that are complementary to your own. Contact them and propose opportunities for working together.

Improve Your Products or Services

You may be able to get existing customers to purchase more and attract new clientele by simply improving the products or services you already offer. Whether it's tweaking to get something to work better, finding new uses for your top-selling item, bringing your service from good to outstanding, improvements to your existing business line can do wonders for your future success.

Diversify Your Offer Lineup

Look into diversifying your offers. What complementary products or services or information can you offer in your business? In order to grow, you need to think about expansion. Identify new opportunities within your niche. Uncover the pain points. What else can you sell to your clients. Where else can you add value in the exchange?

Tap Into Your Existing Market

Many business owners think the best way to expand is to gain more new customers. While this certainly isn't a bad objective, tapping into the customers you already have might be a wiser (and more cost-effective) method for growth. Focus on getting repeat business from people who have already bought from you, whether through a loyalty program, upselling, or something else.

Expand Your Reach

Another effective way to achieve business growth is to make your product or service available to an entirely new prospective customer pool. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, from opening a second location in a new city or state to starting a virtual store on the web. It could also be as simple as targeting a new demographic in your existing locale.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a computer keyboard. The focus is on several social media icons: a red circular icon with a white 'V' (Vimeo), a blue circular icon with a white 'f' (Facebook), and a white circular icon with a black 'i' (Instagram). The text 'Instagram' is visible on a key to the left of the Facebook icon. The background is dark, and the lighting is soft, creating a professional and tech-oriented atmosphere.

Build a bigger online presence

Even if you don't have an online business, expanding your online brand presence is crucial to getting your product in front of more eyes, especially if your product sells directly to consumers. Some strategies you might consider:

Post content consistently. Whether you share content via a blog, newsletter or Twitter account, posting regularly will help your followers stay interested and engaged with your brand. Use tools like Hootsuite and IFTTT to schedule posts and shares.

Stay true to your brand identity. Whichever online platform you use to promote your business, make sure the content you post is consistent to your brand's identity. For example, if your brand is about simplicity and minimalism, you probably don't want to post something about the best Black Friday deals.

Run a promotion. Generate buzz around your business with a giveaway or contest. For example, Lonely Planet uses Instagram to encourage users to tag their travel photos for a chance to be featured on the Lonely Planet page. This expands their reach to other audiences and gets users to advertise Lonely Planet at no cost to the brand.

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Diversify

You may already be known for selling one product, but adding a new one into the mix can breathe new life into your business and help you capture sales from new and existing clientele. Brush up on the product lifecycle, and do some market research to identify new needs or pain points you may be able to address with a new product or service. You may also be successful in expanding your offering to include products that complement one another. This can increase your upselling opportunity and subsequently improve your bottom line.

The opportunities for growth are there, you just need to put the pieces in place to make that growth a reality. By implementing one or more of the above strategies, you should make great progress over the coming months and finish 2020 a stronger, more successful business than you are today.

Share Your Expertise

Don't rely only on your products and services to bring in customers. You have knowledge in your industry or niche that can be valuable to your customers.

Sharing this information will show customers that you know what you're talking about and can bring value to the relationship outside of providing goods and services. When a customer wants to know something in a specific industry, they'll remember that you can help.

A blog on your website as well as regular emails or newsletters will keep your business at the top of customers' minds.



AN EXAMPLE

The Secret to Peloton, Apple, Netflix, and Tesla's Growth: It's Vertical Integration

Instead of just focusing on one thing, these companies are building and mastering every part of the market themselves.

by Leonard Sherman

Peloton announced blowout earnings last week, and has joined an elite club that includes Apple, Netflix and Tesla. These companies not only delight their customers and create enormous shareholder value, but they also operate a highly vertically integrated enterprise. The success of these companies is rewriting some outdated rules on what drives effective business strategy.

If you want to thrive in today's market, it's worth understanding exactly what's behind these companies' growth ... and how different it is from the way companies used to think.

A quarter-century ago, in their widely acclaimed book *Competing For The Future*, C. K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel argued that market leaders owe their success to an identifiable set of core capabilities, which allow them to outperform competitors. These capabilities could be in engineering, product design, manufacturing, supply chain management or marketing prowess, enabling their masters to achieve market leadership in distinctive ways.

For example, through the lens of capability-driven strategy, Walmart exploited its expertise in global sourcing and supply chain management to build a formidable competitive advantage in wide product selection at everyday low prices. Toyota, meanwhile, achieved market leadership by excelling in product engineering and efficient, high-quality manufacturing.

To grow big, the theory went, market leaders should heavily reinvest in what they're best at — and outsource non-core business functions to third parties. Accordingly, Walmart didn't seek to design or manufacture its own products and Toyota left retailing operations to independent car dealers.

AN EXAMPLE

A decade later, this thinking was picked up by Bain consultants Chris Zook and James Allen, who turned it into conventional wisdom. It's why, when Apple first announced plans to open company-owned stores, and Amazon began designing its own consumer electronics, the pundits of the business world piled on. In 2001, Bloomberg published what turned out to be a spectacularly misguided commentary titled "Sorry, Steve [Jobs]: Here's Why Apple Stores Won't Work." And Amazon was often pilloried after launching its first generation Kindle for what was considered a hubristic, ill-fated venture into the realm of consumer electronics design where the company didn't belong.

What did these critics miss? They were attached to this "capability-driven strategy"—the idea that companies should focus exclusively on what they're best at. And they didn't realize that the idea was flawed, and getting old.

For starters, they failed to recognize that capability-driven strategy often encourages mature companies to cling to outdated skills and assets that limit growth opportunities. Stick-to-your-knitting managerial mindsets instinctively resist disruptive changes that may cannibalize current sales, and they tend to frame strategic choices inappropriately. Instead of focusing primarily on how current assets can be exploited to increase near-term sales, managers should also be asking how and where consumers want to be served, and what capabilities are needed to best reach them? For example, while Walmart and IKEA have long been market leaders in big-box retailing, both were late — and are now playing catch-up!—with ecommerce capabilities.

Meanwhile, a new generation of companies were much more open earlier in their development to vertical integration — building and mastering every part of the market themselves. Native ecommerce startups like Warby Parker, for example, recognized the potential to expand their market reach through physical retailing. Then they built the requisite omnichannel retailing skills internally.

Startups should be particularly open to building vertically integrated capabilities when appropriate as soon as funding capacity and management talent and bandwidth permits, for three reasons.



First, at inception, startups often don't have a deep reservoir of expertise in any core competencies. There are no assets or manager egos to protect and no sales to cannibalize. Finding the right mechanisms to achieve target market growth are paramount drivers of early stage venture strategy.

Second, for highly innovative ventures, the requisite product design, manufacturing and distribution skills may simply not be available from third-party providers. That forces entrants to build their own capabilities to support category-defining new approaches. This was the case with both Tesla and Allbirds, who of necessity were deeply involved in product design, global supply chain management, manufacturing and new retailing formats to launch their game-changing products.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, vertical integration can give companies more control over delivering superior products and better experiences at every customer touchpoint. For example, it is now generally recognized that Apple's tight control over hardware and software design, as well as operating its own company stores, have contributed to superior product performance, customer satisfaction, and price realization, more than offsetting the increased costs and complexity of managing a vertically integrated enterprise.

AN EXAMPLE

Peloton provides another illustrative case in point.

In 2011, John Foley conjured up an idea for a “connected fitness” company that would ultimately require expertise in hardware design, software development, professional video production, fitness studio operations, and physical retailing, none of which matched the founder’s professional background. The initial plan was to rush a minimum viable product to market by fitting Peloton’s own software and electronics to existing bicycle and tablet computers, enabling its products to monitor real-time rider performance and stream online spin classes. But at this and several other pivotal milestones along the way, Foley and his co-founders decided that the company would be better off developing its own products and internal capabilities, rather than relying on third party providers.

Among the capabilities it created itself:

After concluding that existing bicycles and tablets were not suitable for the company’s intended use, Peloton designed its own custom bike from the ground up, with entirely proprietary hardware and software.

Peloton recruited and trained its own instructors, rather than partnering with existing fitness boutiques

Peloton deployed its own state-of-the-art production studios and fitness boutiques, rather than tapping into existing facilities

Peloton developed its own network of retail outlets to complement its ecommerce channel, rather than selling through existing stores

Peloton backward integrated into company-owned hardware manufacturing after initially relying on contract manufacturers

Peloton developed its own “white glove” delivery/installation service, rather than relying solely on third party logistics providers

AN EXAMPLE

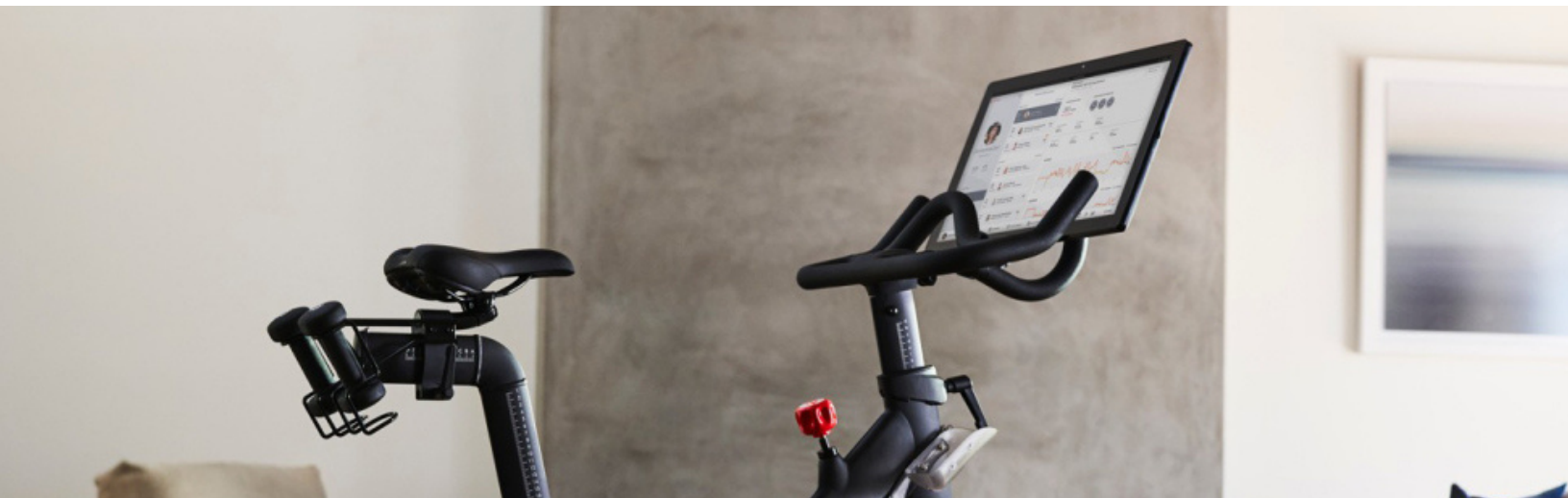
This sequence of strategic decisions unquestionably increased Peloton's capital requirements, which Foley acknowledges severely stressed the company during its early development. But as evidence mounted that Peloton was delivering a superior product and customer experience to a rapidly growing base of enthusiastic and loyal subscribers, the company was able to raise nearly \$1 billion in private capital.

In its public offering prospectus filed last summer, Peloton described the scope of its vertically integrated operations as follows: We are a technology media software product experience fitness design retail apparel logistics company.

Peloton IPO'd in September, 2019. By mid-2020, it was serving over one million subscribers in four countries and generating over \$1.8 billion in annual revenue with strong positive operating cash flow. As a testament to the success of its vertical integration strategy, Peloton currently achieves higher hardware gross profit margins (45%), higher customer satisfaction (93 NPS) scores and higher customer retention rates (92%) than Apple or Tesla.

Peloton's success is not to meant to be a blanket endorsement for high levels of vertical integration. The traditional rules of asset management still apply to corporate decisions on forward and backward integration. Higher levels of vertical integration can provide greater operational control across a company's value chain, but must be weighed against added investment and operating expenses, management complexity and the loss of flexibility often found in companies with large legacy asset bases.

But companies should also give careful consideration to three pivotal questions to guide their strategic decisions on vertical integration.





Does owning or controlling assets and capabilities across the value chain significantly improve product performance and customer experiences?

For companies like Apple, Netflix, Tesla, Ikea, Allbirds, and Peloton, vertical integration has proven to be a key driver of superior company performance, while also building barriers to competition.

Can the requirements for capability-building capital be scaled to reflect a company's stage of development?

While early stage ventures are often strapped for capital, they have the advantage of being able to build and launch capabilities in small increments, before committing to large scale rollouts. For example, Peloton tiptoed into retailing, streaming video classes, and white-glove bicycle delivery with small pilot operations in a single metropolitan area before expanding the scope of its operations internationally. In contrast, when Ikea decided to significantly upgrade its ecommerce capabilities, it faced nine-figure investments to build fulfillment centers, webstore infrastructure and new operating processes across its multinational operations prior to launch.



Are the products and services offered conducive to generating premium returns from superior product performance and customer satisfaction?

The required investments in vertical integration can only be justified if enough consumers recognize and are willing to pay premium prices for superior performance. Not all product categories meet this requirement, but market leaders in businesses with a strong personal and emotive connection to customers -- for example in health and wellness, automobiles, mobile technology, and entertainment -- have successfully exploited high levels of vertical integration to build powerfully advantaged, profitable and resilient enterprises.

Peloton answered each of the three questions with an emphatic yes! They chose not to stick to their knitting, and the results speak for themselves.

DID YOU KNOW ...



**Whatever the mind of man
can conceive and believe it
can achieve.**

**All achievement, all earned
riches, have their beginning in
an idea!**



How to Use Customer Stories to Grow Your Business

1. Decide the purpose of your customer stories.

Customer stories can serve many different purposes, from inspiring to providing a detailed description of exactly how a customer implemented your solution. Before you start talking to customers, decide what your primary purpose is. Your purpose may include one or more of the following:

- Show that you have experience in certain industries.
- Communicate that you can best help a certain type of customer (or that you can help a variety of customer types).
- Reveal the excellence of your customer service — how much customers love working with you.
- Highlight your company's unique value proposition.
- Identify the pain points your product solves.
- Describe the use cases of your product.
- Demonstrate your product features in action.



How to Use Customer Stories to Grow Your Business

2. Identify your format.

Traditionally, customer stories follow a problem-solution-results format, and this is a good one. It allows you to dig into the pain points your prospects feel, show how your product is designed to solve their pain points and present real-world results your customers experience, with metrics to back them up. But this isn't the only format you can use.

Other options include:

- **Feature-story style narrative:** This format is similar to what you see with a personal profile in a magazine. It gives you a bit of flexibility so you can get more creative.
- **Interview:** This is the format we've chosen for Designli's customer stories. Our customer stories are presented in a Q&A format, with the questions designed to solicit responses that will inspire readers and get them excited to build their own products. Your interview questions will be based on the purpose you've chosen for your customer stories.
- **Video:** Video customer stories can stand alone or accompany other formats. For example, if you have a blog post featuring a customer story, you could lead with a video version. Customer story videos are typically short and include the most memorable snippets of a customer's conversation with you.

The format you choose will be based on your purpose, the content format your prospective buyers prefer and your team's skills. Don't be afraid to mix it up and combine different formats.

3. Build an interview guide.

A good customer story depends on the customer conversation it's based on. Before you talk with a customer, you'll want to know exactly what questions you're going to ask. The purpose of your customer story will determine the types of questions you ask, but consider including questions about the customer's business, their situation (and the pain points involved) prior to using your product, the buying process, implementing and using the product, and the results the customer was able to achieve with your product.

You don't have to follow a script precisely. In fact, you'll want to be flexible and let the conversation guide you to ask follow-up questions when appropriate. But, creating a list of the questions you want to ask will help keep you on track and ensure you don't miss anything important.

How to Use Customer Stories to Grow Your Business

4. Create a pitch for your customers.

Getting customers to participate in a customer story can be difficult because it takes time on their part. They also may not want to reveal “behind-the-scenes” information, especially if their situation prior to purchasing your product was embarrassing to them. There are ways you can overcome resistance, however. Approaching your customers with a “pitch” will help them see what’s in it for them. Here are just a few value propositions for encouraging your customers to participate.

- Position them as a leader.
- Show their savvy in solving a problem.
- For B2B customers, help promote the decision-maker’s skill in choosing an effective solution.
- Give them publicity.
- Provide links to their website.

What are some ways to use customer stories?

You can use your customer stories in a multitude of ways, both in your marketing and sales processes. Here are just a few.

- Create a customer story section on your website.
- Write blog posts featuring your stories.
- Include stories in your e-newsletter.
- Post snippets of your stories on social media and link to the full story.
- Use as a content offer in your blog posts or long-form content.
- Create a press release from each of your stories.
- Supply your sales team with your story collection for them to use in prospect follow-ups.

Customer stories are one of the most effective marketing tactics you can include in your strategy because they show your product in action and offer social proof. And, because you can use them in so many different ways, you can get ample mileage out of them.

Plug In



Join the Chamber!

Don't get me wrong, joining the chamber will not automatically part the heavens and new business will fall from the sky. That's not how anything works.

But once you join the chamber "be" a part of the group. What does that mean?

Show up.

That's it really, all you need to do is show up, participate. Part of owning a business or selling for one is to be visible in the community. It takes about 6-9 months of "showing up" before you begin to build relationships. So, it doesn't happen overnight.

The philosophy we live by at the chamber is this: "It's not about you"

What does that mean? If you can participate and look for ways to contribute and help others something really magical begins to happen your business grows. We've seen our share of people try to complicate it but it's really this simple.





You are the master of your destiny. You can influence, direct and control your own environment. You can make your life what you want it to be.

The way of success is the way of continuous pursuit of knowledge.

