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into the light

making our way through the economic tunnel

EDITORIAL | MICHAEL DOTSON





MICHAEL DOTSON

Michael Dotson, is chief executive officer, WorkSmart Media Group. Worksmart Media Group was created to provide marketing assistance for small to medium-size companies. Utilizing their experience, expertise, and networked resources they help businesses “work smarter.” Dotson was vice president of retail sales at US Modular, a leading manufacturer of personal and enterprise storage and power supply products. Experienced in managing several products at the retail and OEM-level, Dotson has worked in marketing distribution and territory development for the past 30 years. His relationships with key accounts such as CompUSA, Amazon, Best Buy, Wal-Mart and Dell were key to supporting US Modular’s aggressive growth plan.

We are facing challenges in our economy the likes of which have not been experienced in most of our lifetimes. News stories seem to bounce from bad to worse, from hope to despair, leaving relatively rare moments of optimism and huge holes of uncertainty. **The primary result of this combined “gloom and doom” assault has rendered many businesses paralyzed with a sense of fear for the present and the future.**

Such paralysis has slowed the progress of even the most (formerly) dynamic of companies to a crawl. Economists are left scratching their heads unsure of what to do, and marketing departments for many companies appear to be more preoccupied with job preservation than re-establishment of momentum. As professionals, how do we “break away” from this stagnation and take advantage of opportunities to grow our business?

UNDERSTAND THE TERRAIN

Wikipedia defines *trench warfare* as “a form of warfare where both combatants have fortified positions and fighting lines are static.” The key word here is *static*. By recognizing and accepting that businesses have hunkered down and that the static lines in our economy are likely to remain for the foreseeable future, you can begin to develop a path that will enable your business to move forward.

RECOGNIZE THAT EARLY PROGRESS COULD BE AGONIZINGLY SLOW

With a robust economy, success could not happen fast enough. In World War I, forward tactical advancement had often been measured in feet or sometimes inches – so it is in the economic “trenches” of today. Given our current situation, it may seem that everything is happening in *slow motion*. Your business plan must take into consideration a reduced pace of progress. Sustainable success can best be achieved through a series of *small victories*.

LOSE THE FEAR!

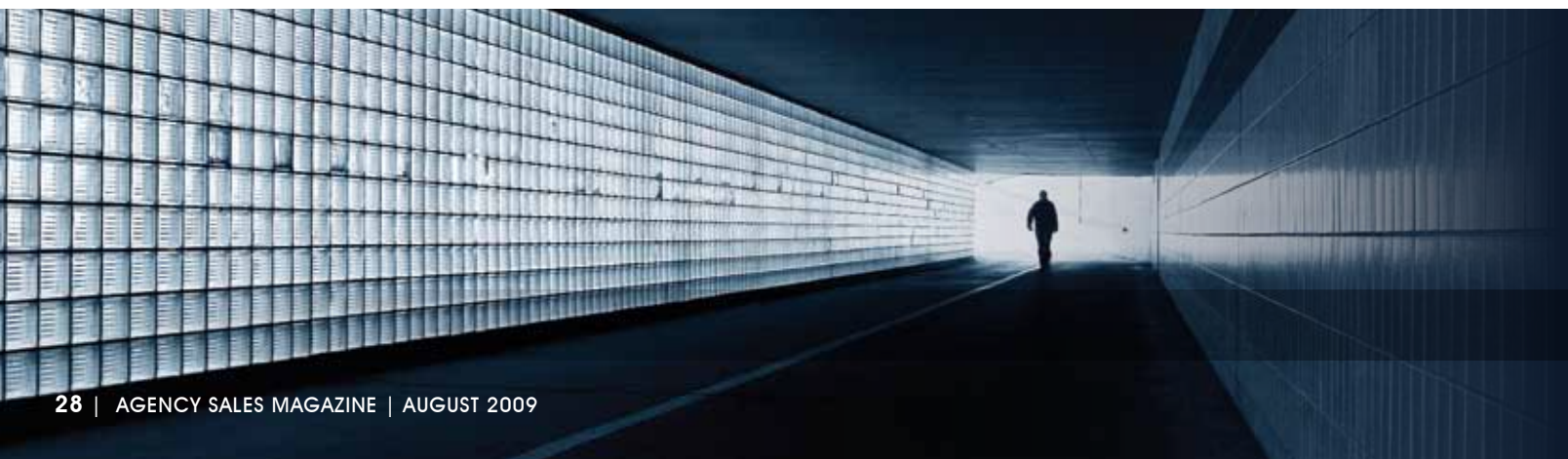
A good insurance salesperson knows that fear is a strong motivator. It is also understood that fear is an emotion that needs to be brought under control or it will lead to distress and high anxiety. This does not mean that apprehension should be abandoned, but it does mean that your success will be determined by how you deal with not only your fears, but your approach in dealing with the fears of your customers, clients, and competitors. The sense of fear will begin to move from the forefront as you focus your attention on your immediate plan of action.

BE DIFFERENT

There is a common adage that goes something like – *performing the same action repeatedly with the expectation of a different outcome is a definition of insanity*. What may have worked for us last year, last week, or even yesterday may not work in today’s economic climate. Take deliberate steps to be different in your approach. Breaking from the routine will cause you to begin looking at your business with a fresher perspective.

BE A PUZZLE SOLVER

Sudoku and crosswords can be stimulating ways to pass time. Treating your business as a puzzle to be solved can add a new dimension to your efforts. Writing down specific problems to be *solved*, then writing down your solutions can often lead to unexpected and creative results.



PART OF EVERY BUSINESS DAY NEEDS TO BE DEVOTED TO CONDUCTING RESEARCH ONLINE.

EVERY BUSINESS HAS A STORY TO TELL

Whether it is your business or your customer's, there is a story that needs to be told. One of the best ways to get that story out is through the creative use of *Public Relations*. PR does not have to be an expensive proposition. PR companies are feeling the slowdown like everyone else, and are looking for new clients like never before. Using their professional services on a *per-event* basis could give your business greater exposure with minimal expense. Also, remember that a well-crafted and timed *press release* can reward you with huge dividends.

MAKE TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR YOU

Nearly every business has a *database* of email addresses—including yours. These may consist of customers, clients, friends, or others whom you connect with on a regular basis. *Email marketing* is a proven cost-effective way to get your business message in front of your database. There are many ways to take advantage of this relatively new kind of marketing such as email blasts or even the newest form of email marketing — emailable video (video brochures). To reach a larger audience, many companies offer *opted in* email lists that can be quite specific for a given type of business or customer. You should avoid bulk email lists, which are often associated with *spam* (very different than opted in pre-qualified lists). The creative use of email could become the most cost-effective method for you to promote your business.

DIRECT MAIL STILL WORKS

Even with rising postal costs, *direct mail* can be a very effective way to get your message out to a broad area. A number of companies offer quality mailing lists with relatively low cost. Keep in mind that when you decide to do a bulk mail, your response will nearly always be a very small percentage

of the number of pieces that you mail out. Sometimes they can be a fraction of a percent, but that is often enough to justify the expense.

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION BETTER THAN THEY KNOW YOU

Staying on top of your competition is now more important than ever. Rest assured that your competitors are experiencing the same economic anxiety as you and may be dealing with it in ways that you should be aware of. There is much that you can learn by simply observing how your competitors are changing *their approach* to how they do business.

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HOMEWORK!

The Internet is the single greatest research tool ever developed. A certain part of every business day needs to be devoted to conducting research online. By using the resources of the Internet daily, you will be able to stay informed of the many subtleties pertaining to your business. You will be able to learn about new products, technology, and other pertinent information that can help give you a competitive edge. The Internet can also provide a wealth of historical information regarding all aspects of your business (and that of your competitors).

Clearly, there is no single magic way out of our current economic mess. One thing is certain — *doing nothing will produce nothing and doing little will produce little!* But just like a magician who diligently practices the complexities of a new card trick until perfected, the result of you working smart and paying attention to the little victories can bring a gasp from your “audience” and the resulting question, “How did you do that?” ^{as} _{iii}

YOUR COMPETITORS ARE CHANGING THEIR APPROACH TO HOW THEY DO BUSINESS.