



Welcome to the Ashleys autumn newsletter!

Many greetings to our first e-newsletter – *The Incubator*

I'm afraid if you are looking forward to reading about the riveting changes in Audit Legislation you are in for a disappointing read but if you wish you could contact our office to discuss this. If however you are looking for ways and tips to develop and improve your business for both yourself and your team then by all means read on and I trust your eyes will not glaze over. After all, we are your accountants so we will take care of all the bothersome red tape and compliance that threaten to suck the life out of any small business owner, and I'm sure you don't want to read about it either. In fact most accountants' newsletters I receive put me to sleep within the first ten lines of stilted narrative!

However, as your business advisors we want to proactively help you grow your business. So that is what these next few pages are about – plus a bit of fun thrown in – so please read – and hopefully enjoy.

Moreover, as feedback is the breakfast of champions I would welcome any comments – good or bad – which arise from this edition.

We know we can always improve.

Happy reading

Brian Burke
Editor



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Remember: making excuses and making money are mutually incompatible!

Survival of the *fittest*

by Brian Burke



Well, we have a new government...

...but Messrs Cameron and Clegg have inherited a heck of a big problem – we and the rest of the world are on the brink of financial turmoil that could make the recession look like a walk in the park!

Some people suggest that we are coming out of recession but I think words like 'Recession' can be misleading. Whatever the technical description of what's going on in our economy, the reality is this – People's buying behaviours have changed radically – and they aren't changing back any time soon. Sure people still want to buy, but they don't want to spend. They're more cautious, more careful and that means that all us entrepreneurs have to work that much harder to make sales. We have to market better, think smarter, get in front of people more often, make more compelling offers, have hundreds of testimonials and case studies, sweat all our assets more effectively – Especially the marketing ones.

I hesitate to use the analogy but I think it's appropriate and works well – Darwin's survival of the fittest. We're already seeing it in every town and city across the land. Average shops are closing down. Average/normal businesses are disappearing as are average and run down public houses. Most of those that are left are 'bumbling along'. Getting by.

But what's interesting is that in most towns there are some shops left that are doing really well. They are the ones who've built great relationships with their customers. They communicate with them often, are adept at getting new customers and are also tweaking and adjusting their marketing. The same applies in pretty much every other Sector. There are fewer average small businesses, with average marketing. It was OK to ride the

tidal wave of growth during 2004, 2005 and 2006 but those days are gone. Everyone was buying everything back then and it was comparatively much easier to build a successful business. But they're not anymore – and you can't survive, let alone flourish and thrive if you're AVERAGE.

My prediction is that things will get worse over the next 18 months before they start to get better. Survival of the fittest. Death to the rest. Harsh, unpleasant – but true.

It's not all bad news though. You see you are in control here. You can choose to NOT be average and many of our clients make that choice every day. They'll be OK – they'll do just fine and some of them will be making their fortunes over the next couple of years.

They recognise that getting really good at marketing and selling, for instance, is going to be critical. Most business owners who struggle, do so because they don't know what they don't know. They've never even seriously thought about marketing, or online marketing, say, let alone their sales skills.

But you DO know what you don't know – or at least what you don't DO(!) – So stay focused, be a marketer NOT a doer (for at least some of the time every week) and watch the improvement.

I am happy to donate a half hour of my time and a product worth £200 as a free gift to get you started. Between us we can then make a plan to help develop your business in the way it should really be going to flourish in this tough climate. Just call Louise or one of my team members and they will arrange a time to see me.

Photo: iStock

What is all this **twitter**™?

Like it or not Twitter, Facebook etc, etc are all here to stay – and used properly can actually help your business – here’s a guide to the basics. For further information contact our in house Twitterer – Shane White on 01462 422555.

First of all, there are three types of tweet:

1. A broadcast tweet – when you share with people something that is going on in your life/business, ie you are broadcasting out to the world.

2. An engagement tweet – this is when you are responding to something that someone else has said on Twitter.

3. An “Interesting Stuff” tweet – when you put something out that has no direct relevance to what you are doing that day (it might be a quote, say, or an observation about something), or else you re-tweet something interesting that someone else has said.

To become really effective on Twitter and build a strong following of people who like you and engage with you (and who are therefore most likely to do business with you), then you need to be tweeting two or more of each on a daily basis. It is really easy to do – and should take you less than five minutes a day to do well.

Broadcast Tweets

The first rule is to be interesting. Try to write in an engaging or even quirky fashion – don’t be too stilted or boring – or overlong.

Engage with people

Engagement tweets are even easier – it involves you simply looking at what other people are talking about and responding in some way. Make people feel good about themselves. Tell them how amazing they are, how impressed you are, make them feel great – people like people that do that for them. It’s a very simple tactic but it works.

Interesting Stuff

With regard to the third type of tweet, Interesting Stuff, there are loads of sources of materials. Places like www.stufftotweet.com or www.alltop.com are great for this.

No one likes a bore...

One of the things that you really must be wary of on Twitter is just talking about yourself no-one likes a bore – and also no-one likes someone that just goes on to Twitter and tries to sell.

Imagine “The Party Principle” as far as Twitter is concerned. Think of your behaviour on Twitter in the same way as if you were going to a party where



you knew no-one else there. What you would do is spend some time talking to people, being interested in them, listening to what they had to say, responding accordingly. Every now and again at parties we all meet a bore who comes in and talks only about themselves. Sometimes he /she launches straight into sales mode before they even get to know anybody. You see this happening every day on Twitter and people that come in, just shout about themselves and try to see their services get immediately closed out by the people that are using Twitter properly. Please don’t fall into this trap.

It really can take less than six minutes a day to do this. Don’t forget, Twitter is where the people are. Today, within a ten mile radius of where you’re sitting right now, there are thousands of people on Twitter. If you want to grow your business you shouldn’t ignore them.

Twittering may well apply to some businesses more than others – for pubs, restaurants, shops, it is a vital tool in this day and age and used properly can be one of those ‘little things’ that really help to boost your business.



Shane White – our in-house Twitterer!

What's your referrability factor?

Taken from *The Referral Engine*
by John Jantsch



When it comes to getting a significant amount of business by way of referral some companies are better than others. It's not that they have implemented a better process for asking clients and partners to refer them, it's that they are simply more referable.

Organizations that create the kind of easy buzz that turns into business possess certain qualities at their very core. While these qualities may not come as naturally to some, they can be learned and instilled in any business with enough attention.

John Jantsch studied the habits of numerous organizations that generated most of their business by way of referral and found the following qualities existed in all and contributed to what he came to call their referrability factor.

The most trusted option

In the business of referrals, trust is the most important reason a recommendation is made and, conversely, lack of trust the single greatest reason referrals don't happen. There are countless ways that companies build and break trust with their customers, but most can be summed up with the term, "honesty."

Trust is earned by keeping promises: tangible things like delivering on time, paying bills on time, and honouring guarantees; and less tangible things like authentic marketing messages, caring service, and a culture of respect. Are you the most trusted player in your industry?

Staff as customer

Here's something your customers won't ever tell you but that you had better understand: **Your employees probably treat your customers about the same way you treat your employees.** Let that soak in for a minute, and think about the ways your everyday behaviour might be affecting your organization's ability to generate referrals.

Organizations that easily generate a high number of referrals consider referral factors when they hire and treat their employees like prime target customers.

Hire for fit

One recurring thread in many of the businesses interviewed was the idea of hiring the right people. And this notion starts first with knowing who or what that is. In much the same way a business might research and attempt to attract the ideal customer, referral-based businesses also focus on attracting the ideal employee. The company takes care of the staff, the staff takes care of the customer, the customer takes care of the business.



'Well this explains why the cruise was so cheap!'

Open dashboard

Another common trait among staff-oriented businesses is an openness to communicating the financial aspects of the business. For instance, many offer stock ownership to their employees as a way to keep everyone focused on the growth of the company. Creating a “dashboard,” a simple one-page, high-level view of key strategic, marketing, and financial indicators allows even those in entry-level positions to be a part of the company’s success and strategic vision. It’s also a great way to keep everyone in the organization focused on key goals like referral generation.



A culture of ‘BUZZ’

Highly referred businesses are good enough to make people want to talk about them, but they amplify this natural desire by making word of mouth an essential element of the culture. Companies create buzz with great follow-up, T-shirts and other promotional merchandise, free events, outrageous acts of kindness, anything that contributes to an overall culture of buzz. Companies that focus on creating positive customer experiences at every turn, tap the power of buzz quite naturally, and this habit is something that can be learned. A culture of buzz is not created by attempting to do things that get attention; customers recognize publicity stunts when they see them.

Give to get mentality

There are a handful of golden rules, which vary depending on which set of books you were raised on, but in the business of referrals, and those WHO give usually get! It’s not too hard to grasp this concept; everyone in business has experienced the, ‘and what goes around comes around’ phenomenon. But I’d like to suggest that something deeper exists in the true referral-based mind-set. When a referral strategy pervades your entire business thinking, you begin to approach customer relationships by asking “What am I here to give?” or “How can I serve?” as opposed to “What can I sell?”

Expect referrals

It stands to reason that a customer who comes to your organization by way of referral and then experiences your remarkable level of service is far more likely to become part of your referral team. Remarkable companies expect to receive referrals as a matter of course. In fact, they are confident something went wrong with their process when a customer does not voluntarily refer. If you find yourself saying, “I believe you get referrals by doing good work, not by asking for them,” then I’m going to suggest that you’re not really sure of the value of your products and services. Remarkable companies always ask for referrals, not simply as a way to acquire new business, but also as a way to help the most people get the results they are after.

Premium priced

Too often price is the first and only measure of differentiation when a prospect attempts to compare products, services, and organizations. In the eyes of a prospect, there is risk involved in any transaction no matter how large or small. So, the prospect thinks, if it doesn’t work out with the low-priced company, at least I didn’t overpay. Referred prospects, on the other hand, have the ability to factor value into the equation. When your business comes highly recommended by a friend, the role of risk is minimized, and that fact alone moves the significance of price comparison down the list. I have yet to find a business that relies heavily on referrals and low price leadership as shared strategies.

So, how did you do? Where are the gaps? Where can you go to work on being more referrable?



‘Worry lines – I like to see that in an employee’

Ashleys services and products

(including some you may not be aware of!)

The Ashleys Business Centre

Your Virtual Assistant Call Centre

The complete secretarial support and office services solution.

There is no need to ever miss a call with the possibility of a new source of income again.

How can we help your business?

We can offer a package to suit your business:

- from one-off word processing or photocopying projects to a full secretarial support service
- telephone answering
- dealing with enquiries
- sending out your literature and handling all incoming mail
- e-mail and faxes can be dealt with on your behalf if required
- urgent messages can be passed to you wherever you happen to be

For more information call **Louise** on **01462 420226**

Ashleys Services

- Annual Accounts & Management Accounts - For all Sole Traders, Partnerships, Limited Companies and LLP's contact **Martin van Beek** or **Lisa McCole**
- Added Value Tools – (see products)
- Audit – For all Limited Companies falling under that criteria contact **Sarah Evans**
- Bookkeeping – Contact **Lisa McCole** or **Martin van Beek** for all our bookkeeping services
- Business Planning, Cash Flow etc – Ex-HSBC Bank Manager **David Ward**
- Business Start-up – Contact **Brian Burke**, **Lisa McCole** or

Martin van Beek for all these products and services

- Business Training Seminars – (See our website for ongoing seminars and Ashleys news)
- Companies House Services – we have packages available to deal with all the bureaucracy from Companies House from formation to dissolutions (contact **Louise Szombara**)
- Commercial Finance and Funding – Ex-HSBC troubleshooter **David Ward** is happy to discuss all these areas with you. **First meeting FREE.**
- Tax Planning – **Alistair Forsyth CTA** will advise on all these areas. **First meeting FREE.**
- Mergers & Acquisitions – Senior Partner **Mike Bradly Russell** has a wealth of experience to help you with these tricky matters
- Payroll – **Ken Jones** with over 40 years Payroll Experience will be happy to deal with all matters arising in this complicated field.
- Tax Investigations – Contact our Tax Team (**Alistair Forsyth** or **Shane White**) for a FREE Tax health check up – before the worst happens
- Taxation and VAT – Again the Tax Team are happy to advise on all areas of this ever complicated subject.

Specialist Services

- Construction Industry – **Shane White** or **Alistair Forsyth** will advise on all aspects of Construction Tax
- Investment & Financial – We are happy to advise on IFAs and attend meetings with you in this important area. Contact **Martin van Beek** or **Lisa McCole.**



- Small to Medium Sized Businesses – Advice on Business Growth, Marketing and Development. Contact **Brian Burke**, **Lisa McCole** or **Martin van Beek.**

Personal Services

- Estate Planning
- Personal Tax Planning
- Retirement Strategies
- Self Assessment
- Trusts & Executorships

Ashleys Products

- Business Start Up Kit

(Incorporates)

- SSTW – Simple Stuff That Works
- The Numbers File – Complete Accounts Information System
- Benchmarking Services – Compare Your Performance to Others in Your Sector
- Marketing Services – Contact Brian Burke for your complimentary Introductory Meeting
- Ashleys Better Business CD – over 20 great ideas!
- Recession Buster Book

All these products can be obtained totally free from us if you call Louise before 31 August 2010.

TAX WAR DECLARED

YOUR ACCOUNTANTS NEED YOU!

Budget declares £4.6 billion Tax War on North Hertfordshire!

YES THAT'S US!

This Budget will probably go down in the history books as the day a "Tax War" was unofficially declared on the people of North Hertfordshire. It wasn't obvious in the Chancellor's speech, but we estimate that over the next few years the government will need to claw back £4.6 billion from the region in the form of higher taxes and fewer public services.

That equates to £90,000 per average North Hertfordshire household. For above average households the amount will be many times that. And for some it will even run into the millions. So anyone who doesn't prepare themselves for the onslaught will suffer really badly at the hands of much higher income tax, VAT, and capital gains tax rates, huge reductions in state benefits, the decimation of the tax incentives for business investment, a forecast increase in unemployment and the very real risk that the austerity measures here and abroad will lead to a double dip recession – phew – that's a nice present from our new coalition!

In the face of all those enormous financial challenges the question every tax payer in North Herts must now ask themselves every year is this: "Am I 100 percent certain that I am paying the legal minimum amount of tax?" Since to pay more than the legal minimum means you and your family will not be able to afford the standard of living you would otherwise be able to afford, will have to work longer to build up the same retirement fund, and won't be able to pass as much on to your loved ones – one thing that didn't rise was the limit for starting to pay Inheritance Tax!

To have any chance in the Tax War, you must get confirmation every year that you are paying the legal minimum.

In my experience there is always something more that can be done with the right advice. And I do mean 'always'. For example, we regularly see average households being thousands of pounds a year worse off than they should be, and above average households who lose tens of thousands a year by not getting the very best

advice. So the best advice has to be don't sell your family short by paying more than you need to." – Every client should receive a copy of 'Taxability' each year which probes where you may be paying too much, but we appreciate most of you won't even read it! So our gift to you is a FREE session with one of our tax team to go through all the areas relevant to you and if necessary give you that guidance which will help you win your own small – or maybe not so small – battle in the TAX WAR.

To arrange a meeting with Alistair Forsyth or Shane White just e-mail: alistair@ashleys.co.uk or shane@ashleys.co.uk



Ashleys news and events

Ashleys Wine Tasting Evening (in association with Hedley Wight of Hitchin)

- 11 October, 6 pm–9 pm
- leave the car at home and sample some of the latest and greatest wines from around the world.
- £10 per person
- FREE lift home in the Burkey mini-bus! (subject to Burkey's discretion).
- Phone Louise to book your place early – limited to 20 people.

Alistair's 'Tax' Seminar

- October 20, 3 pm–4.30 pm (followed by light refreshments)
- Our Tax Manager will cover all the tax 'hot spots' thrown up by recent legislations, and how you can plan to save yourself some tax in these difficult times.
- £30.00 (which also covers refreshments at the end)
- Phone Louise to book your place early – limited to 16 places.

Please get in touch

We would love to know what you think of our newsletter. Also if there is something you would like to see featured in a future issue, please let us know.

Please e-mail Louise@ashleys.co.uk

See you next issue!

All the best from the Ashleys team

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Photos by Shane White (unless otherwise credited)

This newsletter has been produced by

[maythymecreative](http://maythymecreative.com) a partner of [thecreativemix](http://thecreativemix.com)

Please visit our own website www.creative-mix.co.uk to see the 'exciting and inspiring' communications we can provide for your business or organisation.

'Wally' is back!

The 'Wally' Workshop – or *Making Your Business Really Fly* is a 3-hour workshop which all business owners should attend as a no-brainer. Brian put over 200 clients and contacts through this process in the late 90s and early '00s and believes the times are right to reintroduce the practice.

The session involves a host of great ideas and tools as to how to really grow your business so it works properly. The most common excuse given for non attendance is 'I just haven't the time!' Well we're sorry but if that is the case you will **never** change anything and your business will **never** reach the heights it probably deserves.

Two sessions are being run in the autumn as follows:

12 October 9.00 am–1.00 pm

3 November 1.00 pm – 5.00 pm

The cost is £150 per person, however if you book before 31 August you will receive an 'early bird' discount of 33½%.

Places are strictly limited to eight per session.

Also, listen up!

We guarantee that if you are not delighted with what you can learn and implement, we will refund your booking fee in total with no questions asked. What have you got to lose? – **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!**

The last word...

