

# Marketing Tips for Small Businesses Struggling to Survive Tough Times

Interview with Jon Ward, co-founder of Click for Clients

**Tom:** For people that aren't familiar with you, just give a little background how you got into marketing, branding, and that type of stuff.

**Jon:** All right. So I'm Jon Ward and I began my business career as a copywriter in faraway England and worked for some years with the leading design company in England actually at that time, Pentagram, I was their primary copy writing resource for many years. Also, I worked with Reuters in England in their business division as a writer.

Cutting the long story short, I came to the United States and advanced from simply copy writing into becoming co-owner of an advertising agency in Phoenix, Arizona, and worked in that space as one of the leaders of the agency and also as creative director for the credit side of that business. That was a huge education, of course, in many ways, working mostly with large corporate clients.

And then after that, when that period was done, I became a consultant in the branding field and through that, developed relationships by chance with people in the education space starting first of all with Robert Kiyosaki, of "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" and then moving on to Trump University, Donald Trump's organization and became very involved in producing education content for a business audience. And I continue to provide consulting services in branding and marketing to mostly entrepreneurial clients.

And I am also in the process of launching with my friend and colleague, Andy Renk, a business called "Click for Clients" which will provide both educational services and online marketing services to small business.

**Tom:** That's a quite a varied background but tons of experience. It's really impressive. I can say the first thing like I have mentioned where I wanted to touch on marketing and specifically marketing in today's economic climate. And I wanted to start off with, "Why you think marketing your business right now is important?" you know. Because I think there's a lot of people that are cutting back on marketing now.

**Jon:** Yes. People do and fear gets in and of course you're going to have to

discipline your budget. No one would argue with that and you might have to market smarter and you might have to find more economical ways to do it but you should definitely be increasing and not decreasing your marketing.

Marketing is the life blood of any business and when you're in a situation of external constriction as we have with the economy, the last thing you want to do is to add to your problems by your own internal constrictions. That's understandable but frankly foolish. It is essential for the health and survival and growth of your business. To put more energy into marketing, the more challenging your business environment is. It's the one area that you should never, never compromise with because what is marketing?

Marketing is about putting yourself in connection with potential buying customers. Without those customers, you have no business. So it's a very simple logic but don't get into the fear. Continue and if anything, increase your marketing activities.

**Tom: One of the things you mentioned there right at the beginning was about marketing smarter. Are there certain types of strategies right now that are more effective?**

Jon: Well, there are a couple of things here. One of the points about an environment like this is that actually just being a marketer is smart because of the contraction that's going on, because many of your competitors will be marketing less, you have a more open field. It's a bit like in any downturn, you want to be a contrarian. If everybody is selling, you want to buy. And if everybody stops marketing, you want to market more. You give yourself a competitive advantage just by moving ahead when others are moving backwards.

Specifically, in terms of what is smart to do now, let's talk about off line marketing, which I don't do much off and I'm kind of out that game. Nevertheless, there is a place for off line marketing. So, let's touch on it briefly. One of the nice things about the current situation is if you are smart, you can buy advertising really cheap.

There are incredible deals to be heard in terms of television, radio and so forth, and print media that you wouldn't be able to get six months ago or 12 months ago. So, I wouldn't discount off line media.

Having said that to my mind, and I'm biased because of where I sort of live

and breathe as a business person these days, but I have absolutely no doubt that the most cost effective engine for marketing that's available to just about any business in the Internet.

So what I would do is do whatever it takes to increase your mastery of online marketing. That can get you a more focused, broader, more targeted, larger audience. The great thing about the Internet, well there are many, many great things about online marketing, but one of them is that you can keep adapting. You can keep learning. You create your own learning feedback loop. So as one thing works, you do more of it. If something else doesn't work, you do less of it. It's much harder to do in conventional media where you get locked in by your own costs to a specific track.

**Tom:** **So it sounds to me like it's more than just simple getting a web site up and then just hoping people are going to come to your web site. It's actually you may be testing a few things on the web site, but doing things also beyond your web site as well. Is that correct?**

**Jon:** Well, yeah. First of all, I've actually developed a slogan that I'm now putting in front of every client who takes the risk of walking into my space and that slogan is the six most dangerous words in business is "build it and they will come". That, in any respect, whether it's a product or a web site or anything, never, never spend your time and money putting something up on the assumption that people are going to show up. It's a very dangerous track. You have to be proactive and strategic in everything you do currently.

In terms of online marketing, the biggest and most common mistake is exactly that particularly in small business that people put up a web site because they feel they should have one. Everybody has got one after all. And so, they invest some time, well some money in putting up a site and nothing happens. It makes no effect on their business. Why should it? They haven't done anything with it and then they conclude that online marketing doesn't work.

Online marketing can be your most powerful tool but you need to use it actively. The first thing you have to do is educate yourself, which is why I'm in a business of educating entrepreneurs on online marketing. You can't make anything off this if you don't have some know how. Now, there's a great deal you can get other people to do but it's a bit like using attorneys and doctors. It's unwise just to hand all your power over to them.

You should be informed. You should know. You should educate yourself about the Internet as a marketing tool. However much you're going to outsource it, be informed.

So that's the first thing.

The second thing is as you said, once you go to a web site, you got two primary questions that you need to be answering day by day. "How do I drive more traffic?" and that's getting businesses to the site, and, "How do I increase my conversions?" getting those businesses to do something once they get to the site. Those are two quite large areas we could go into more detail but those are the issues you are going to be looking at.

**Tom: Okay. One of those issues I wanted to touch on hopefully with a little more detail, the idea of conversion.**

Jon: Yeah.

**Tom: I think that might confuse some people.**

Jon: Yeah.

**Tom: Could you go into a little bit of detail of what that means?**

Jon: Yeah. It's a bit of a technical term. OK, so here's the thing. This is kind of and always kind of comic because people put up web sites expecting the web site to do something and that's actually there's nothing going on there except that kind of digital billboard saying, "Look how great we are." And so, people come and they go and nothing has taken place.

What you want when you have a web site to your business and I don't care what business. You're a law firm. You got a bakery. You got an undertaker. You're an auto repair shop, you know, whatever it is. When people come to your web site, you want them to do something.

Now, it may not be appropriate for them to buy your services. Not all services are for sale online. Most, in fact, are not. Most products are not sold on the Internet. If you got a product that sell on the Internet, we've got a whole different story to tell about E-commerce but let's assume you're not. You're selling your services in a store or you're providing a service, you know, a professional service, or whatever.

Nevertheless, when people come to your site, it's much better if you can get them to raise their hand in some way, if you can get them to engage in a relationship with you. Marketing is about developing relationships. What you need to be doing and at this time, in particular in this environment, is building the population of people with whom you have an interactive relationship, people who are in communication with you.

So what you want people to do when they come to your web site, first and foremost, is you want them to surrender their contact information and to surrender in a way that actually says, "Yes, I want to hear from you." Now, and that's what we call conversion in the first place. It is converting a visitor into a lead.

Now, people are not going to give away their name, their email address or any kind of contact information without a very good reason to do so. You need to see that as money that they're paying you. It's exactly as if they were writing you a check. They won't write you a check for nothing. They're going to write you a check for the value you give them.

So, when you want people to surrender their contact information and their permission to communicate with them, you need to give them very significant value for doing that and I mean significant. And it's going to be more cost, more time, more effort that you would imagine first looking at this in order to do that. Why would you do that? Because once you've got that lead and it's a real lead, if somebody says, "Yes, I'm really interested in hearing from you," that can be worth a huge amount to you.

So, it makes sense for you to invest in the value that you give in order to capture that information. And the value might be in terms of free guidance, free consultation, free information or product of some kind or another. There are lots of ways to do that. But you got to establish the principles of giving value for that contact information.

The only other thing I have to do is, we're getting a little bit too lengthy, is that other thing is you going to have to experiment. It's very hard to get this right for the first time around. The great thing about the Internet is that you can do trial and error and improve your conversion rates all the time.

**Tom:** **So, initially, what you think might be valuable to somebody coming to your web site very well can be something that they just end up ignoring and something you just need to continue to put things in front of these people.**

Jon: Absolutely. I mean a classic example is, you know, the online, the web site that has a little box somewhere on the home page that says, "Get our newsletter. Enter your name and email address here." Why in heaven's name would I want to get your newsletter? Why? There's no reason.

**Tom: There's no reason.**

Jon: There is absolutely nothing there for me. It's exactly like making a sale. "What's in it for me?" Now, if you say to me, "I'm going to give you six fabulous recipes for," you know, or, you know, "A recipe a day for the next week," if you're in the food business. Or you say to me, "I'm going to give you a free review of your will," if you're a lawyer.

Or let's say, you're an auto mechanic. "I'll give you six tips on how you can increase your gas mileage." "Oh, okay, I like to know how to increase my gas mileage on my car. You can have email address. I'll give you that." And I know, because consider this smart that once I gave you that contact information, you'd probably going to give me more than six tips on increasing my gas mileage and you'll probably going to also be trying to sell me something. I know the deal and I'm okay with that because I'm getting value.

**Tom: What are your thoughts on when you are providing something to a visitor that comes to your site, making it instant or like one of your examples was the free will review which wouldn't necessarily be instant. In your testing, have you seen one working better than the other?**

Jon: I don't have a sure answer to that, Tom, actually. I mean instant is good in principle. Of course, we live in a society that wants everything instant. So I would look for the instant if I could. I think you'd probably going to get a better result. In some businesses, that might be hard because, you know, the nature, the kind of value to give but I would say in general, instant is better.

**Tom: What about something that's really common, well if you hear about it a lot, and that's the idea of because people have less money, a lot of businesses think they need to drop their prices. What are your thoughts on that strategy?**

Jon: Well, I think it's very hazardous and very questionable. I mean there are

ways you could effectively do the same but without actually cutting prices. The problem with cutting prices is this. Once you cut prices, you're doing two things: You are putting a question mark over the value of what it is you're offering and your entering...in a sense you're entering into a commodity market. You're saying it's better to go with me because I'm cheaper than the next guy.

Now, a price based marketing strategy is the hardest thing to sustain and the easiest in which you can get destroyed by competition. Wal-Mart has succeeded. Wal-Mart has basically built its entire empire on the concept of price. It's an amazing achievement but it's very, very difficult to duplicate and I wouldn't want to be there in any business that I know of.

So I'm extremely wary of the positioning that the value of what I have to offer you is cheaper than the next guy. Now, on the other hand, so what you really want to do is to increase your value proposition. What you can do is give more value for the same price. This, in a sense, has the same effect but it doesn't have the downside of putting you in a price war or in devaluing your product. So, I would give more for the price rather than reducing the price.

**Tom: Another question that I have was the idea of adding social media into your marketing strategy which seems like a very cost effective medium. Do you have any thoughts on how businesses can use social media right now?**

Jon: Well, the short answer to that is that it's an immensely powerful way of developing relationships. So we got to wind back here. We got to understand that the essence of marketing is building relationships. If you don't get that, you will not understand the value of social media. If you're still thinking that marketing is about a billboard approach, sticking up sales messages and hoping that people buy, social media will baffle you and irritate you and it won't get you anywhere because if you try putting billboard messages on social media, you'll get thrown out. You'll be trampled on.

People do not like sales messages in the social media world. The social media world is about developing relationships and developing relationships take patience. It takes time. You can't be greedy and grabby. You can't expect instant cash flow out of it. It's a long-term play. It is, to my mind, relationship building is the best play you can make in any marketing strategy and it should be the foundation of your business health. So, I'm all

in favor of social media or as long as you understand what it's there for.

The other thing is you need to educate yourself on how to use it and again, this is building and they come nonsense. I meet people that say, "Well I got a Lincoln account and I put up a profile and nothing happens." Of course, nothing happened. You didn't do anything with it. You got to learn how to use Lincoln or Facebook and there's an education process. You might eventually outsource some of that activity but in the first place, you need to know what's going on there.

So understanding the relationship principle and knowing that you're going to have to educate yourself are two fundamentals and those two things relate to one other point. Social media can eat all your time if you don't know what you're doing. It will eat all your time without generating result, which is even worse.

So, you have to be smart about it. If you're smart about it, it can be an absolutely amazing and potent way and I can tell you anecdotes all day long about people in my circle who had made a lot of money through their use of social media but the way they made their money is to have the patience and the skill to build connections which then translate into business and profit.

**Tom: So, the connections are coming first, that's what I'm hearing, before the profit.**

Jon: It's a connection first. There is no profit in social media without building your connections.

**Tom: That's really refreshing to hear from you because I firmly believe that right now, people and the biggest mistake that they're making is because they need sales, that's all they're focusing on. So the whole relationship and communicating with people, it goes out the door. And it seems like there's so much pressure on the sale strategy right now, and not necessarily a relationship because people are a little impatient.**

Jon: Yeah. Go see a therapist to deal with the anxiety and then you can do your marketing right because it will screw you up. Don't let that fear thing over accelerate you in the wrong way because it pushes people away. It's a bit like courtship, you know. I mean, you know, if you come across too like hungry, it's a turnoff. People don't want your hunger for the sale. It's unpleasant. It's unattractive.

When you're in social media, you want to have a very relaxed, open, inviting, kind of value giving. The thing in social media is you want to be giving away value all day long. Every post you make, every comment you make should. It can be fun; it can be personal. That's good. But you will always want to be adding value to other people's lives and then let the...it's like a karmic circle. You let the good karma come back in business.

**Tom:** **Good point. You have mentioned a couple of times now, the education process. You got to get educated on social media and then, you know, even going back into the whole marketing strategy thing.**

Jon: Right.

**Tom:** **A lot of people will hear that they have to get educated and you hear them say, "Well, I don't have time to do that."**

Jon: Right.

**Tom:** **What are your suggestions there for people that don't have time? Do they make time or you have any other suggestions?**

Jon: Well, to some extent you need to...OK. You need to make time and I know it's hard because personally, I work on the principle that education never ends and I'm an educator. I mean I teach people a lot but I have to keep learning; otherwise, I have nothing to teach them because they will be out of date.

So, there's a couple of things to that. Part of it is pure time management. Education falls in the category of important but not urgent. That's to say, it's extremely important for your business's health but it isn't urgent like making your numbers to this month or making payroll.

So things that are important but not urgent need to be done at the beginning of the day. I don't know any other way of doing them. If you don't plan to do the important not urgent things first, they won't get done. The urgent things will swamp your day. So there is a time management issue.

The other thing is, and this goes back to social media. You can do a tremendous amount of learning very fast by going into the right online resources. Now, I'm going to be a bit self-serving here, but it's not only self because I have my brilliant partner, Andy Renk, as he produces most of the good value here. If you look at the "Click for Clients" blog, and the "Click

for Clients” Twitter, both of those are putting out really useful nuggets that you can just grab hold of very quickly and very fast.

So there’s also that little bit of during the day, just grabbing nuggets here and there and, you know, instead of going to the sports news page or whatever, go to a resource like that and pick out a little gift to yourself of useful information.

**Tom:** I think that’s a great idea because you can go and you can get those nuggets and information but then on the other end, you can watch the strategy that you and Andy are doing. As you said, you are providing value and you’re putting information out there to build a relationship with people.

Jon: Exactly.

**Tom:** You can not only get those nuggets of information, they can study your marketing strategy.

Jon: That’s it and it is marketing. We do it for a reason. I mean we do it because we enjoy it but we also do it because we know that as we build that and the reputation, we are making fertile soil in which sales can grow.

**Tom:** OK, one final question we’re to touch on. You know, last Tuesday, we’re in that, I guess, one strategy session.

Jon: Yes, it’s great. And it was wonderful and helpful. I would recommend anybody to do the same as what we did. I just tell folks what we did here. We did business for Click for Clients and in my business and Tom, you were very kind to be one of a number of smart and brilliant people who gathered to help us and it was an education to me about how willing really good business people are to be helpful and you can do that for your business.

This is a good time during this economy to say, “Who do I know is already good at different things that I’m not so informed about and just buy them lunch.” That’s what we did. I’m supposing we were that generous but you were generous and you came and you spent an hour with us and a couple of hours with us and gave us your wisdom. It was very, very useful.

**Tom:** Right. Like I said right at the beginning of that meeting, you could feel there’s a lot of power and energy in that room with people just sharing

**ideas.**

Jon: Right.

**Tom: One of the ideas that you had shared was increasing referrals right now and that's one area that people should really try to focus on and I want to get your tips for building referrals.**

Jon: OK. It's dear to my heart. Actually, my own business is entirely referral driven. I don't...my consulting business that is, and I've been blessed because I haven't really have to work very hard at that. But there are times when, you know, you have to make more effort and there are times when I've helped clients with this and also observed clients who do this very well.

There are two things about referrals. One of them is so obvious. It's easy to miss but I'm going to say it anyway and that is deliver extraordinary value. Understand that once you've got the client or the customer, the marketing has just begun. This is a marketing process.

So let me just clarify something here. We sometimes think that marketing is something you do up until the sale. And then you go in to delivering the product or service and the marketing has ended.

**Tom: Right.**

Jon: That is not true. The marketing is still going on while you're delivering the product or service. Understand that throughout every interaction with a customer or client is a marketing activity. You are still selling even though you have sold.

Why? Because in really...it's a bit like in a good relationship, a good love relationship. You might have been married for 15 years but you need to go on wooing. You need to go on, you know, making yourself attractive. You need to go on creating joy and romance. So it is with your existing customers because you got to retain them, that's a good thing to prevent the divorce. It's good divorce prevention but the other thing is and this is where we want to go away from that model.

The other thing is they're going to bring you, they're going to refer other people to you. So that's one principle is understanding that marketing continues right into the relationship, into the heart of the customer relationship.

The other thing is that since they are referrals, you have to be willing to ask for them. And because people will kind of love you and love your product or service and they'll forget. It just won't occur them that they should be turning their friends. And they're totally happy to do that but they have to be asked. So, you have to ask people, kind of simple.

**Tom: When you're doing referrals, do you, just like in your marketing materials or do you just write it in there something pretty blatant that you know about, "I appreciate your referral," that kind of stuff?**

Jon: I personally, in my business, I do it more spoken. I'd rather have a conversation and say, "You know what? Do you know anybody else who you feel would benefit from what we've just been through here? I really appreciate you making the connection."

But there's no reason why...now, there are much more formal ways of doing this and I have a, this colleague is a dentist who is evolving a quite a remarkable system for doing this. I can't dispose with details of that because it's kind of under wraps at the moment. But as a principle way, you can actually really set things up and think about how you can set things up to make it enticing for people to refer.

One very simple thing that several people I know in business do is to reward referrals. You don't want to pay people cash. That kind of can make them feel like dirty, you know. Like, "I gave this referral as, you know, in faith. Don't pay me for it."

But you can...there are nice rewards and gifts you can make. There are ways of saying thank you for a referral where you may mail literally, you know, a gift card, or, you know, tickets to the movies, or, you know, opportunity to go to a restaurant or whatever. You can say thank you in a way that actually is reinforcing. I mean we're all Pavlovian by nature. We'll do what we are rewarded for and repeat it.

**Tom: That's a great point there at the end. You know, it seems so basic but I never really thought of that with the whole idea and reward it. It's something good. Wow.**

**All right. I know I said that last one was my final question. So I just want to give you an opportunity in case somebody does...the people who listen to this would like to get a hold of you. I want to give you an**

**opportunity to give your contact information, or any web site or products or whatever you want to talk about.**

Jon: Well, OK. As far as web sites, I mean let's make it easy. The brand is Click for Clients and we haven't actually launched the service yet. But that said though, there's a blog. I've been a bit behind with my blogging but I believe Andy is still active in this. There's a huge amount of content on that blog but just free and just good stuff. I mean we've given away a lot of good knowledge there.

And so, go and enjoy the blog and stay in touch with the Click for Clients story. So, let's make this easy. [clickforclients.com\blog](http://clickforclients.com/blog) and then you can also follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com\clickforclients](https://twitter.com/clickforclients). And then in case, you haven't got the Click for Clients part enough yet, you can email at jon at guess what? [clickfor clients dot com](mailto:jon@clickforclients.com). J-O-N. That is [jon@clickforclients.com](mailto:jon@clickforclients.com).

**Tom: All right.**

Jon: All right.

**Tom: Well, Jon, I appreciate all the information, great information and I'm sure the people who listened to this will find it extremely valuable.**

Jon: Well I hope so.

**Tom: I appreciate your time.**

Jon: It's always good to be with you Tom and I wish you success and I hope we'll find more ways to play together in this exciting space.

**Tom: Oh definitely. We sure will.**

Jon: All right then. Thank you.

**Tom: All right. We'll talk to you soon.**

Jon: Buh bye.