

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

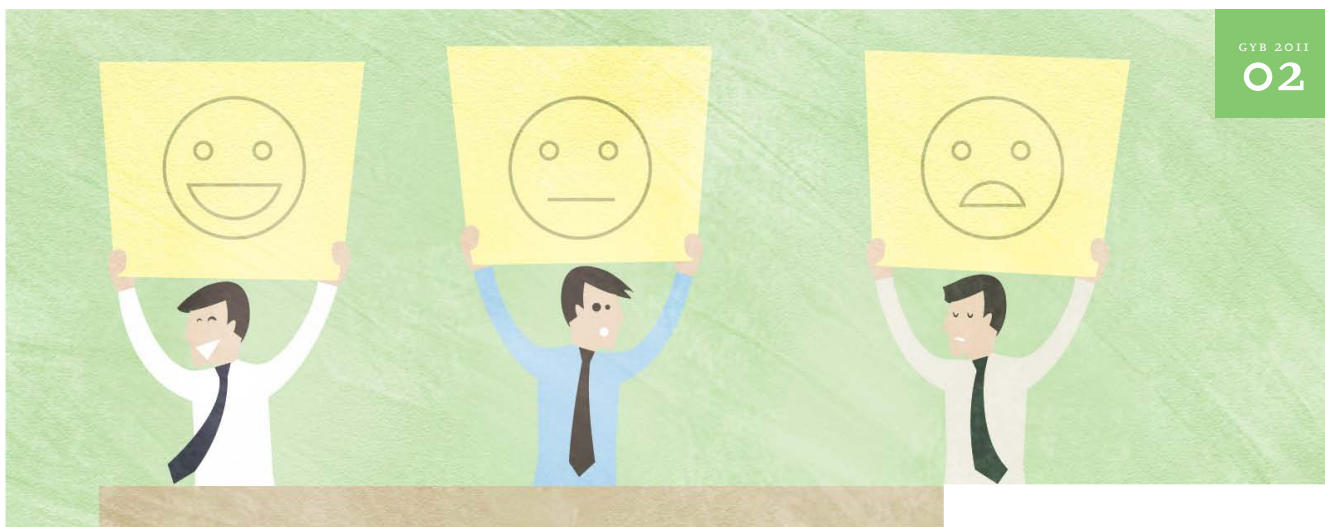
IN THIS ISSUE:

▶ [Measuring Client Satisfaction](#)

▶ [Learning to Share at Work](#)

▶ [The Power of Video Marketing](#)

▶ [The Best Way to Hire](#)



Measuring Client Satisfaction

Firms can spend thousands of dollars on advice from consultants and business experts, but often the best advice is freely given by the people that matter most - your clients.

When you ask a client to write several sentences about their experiences it is also a great way to test confidence in your firm. Which clients would you ask? Are your clients prepared to vouch for your firm with their name? Are you prepared to accept negative feedback?

The rule of thumb is that every disappointed client will share their experience with 10 others. If you aren't collecting negative feedback you are missing out on a great way to improve your business and increase client retention.

Conversely, if your clients tell you what they love about your firm you can use their praise in marketing and promotional material. Popular products can be placed more prominently or spearhead an advertising campaign.

Working on increasing client satisfaction is a great way to build future sales. Word of mouth recommendations are so effective

because they are built on relationships of trust. People are likely to trust their neighbor's recommendation of a local service such as a drycleaner if only because they will see them the following week and tell them whether it was a good tip.

HOW TO COLLECT FEEDBACK

How a firm collects client feedback depends on the number of clients it deals with every week. A high-turnover business such as retail or food might give clients an email address with a small incentive - say a discount on their next purchase - in return for a couple of sentences on the quality of service they received. A firm with a small number of high-value clients might take a more direct, personal approach.

The first step is to have a channel in place for collecting feedback. Passive forms of feedback collection require little effort or cost to establish. Methods include a dedicated email address or a form on the firm's website which automatically creates a spreadsheet of responses. More traditional forms include the self-addressed, pre-paid postage survey or fax feedback forms. Once in place, you

can point to this channel in your invoices or receipts or pamphlets. For example, hotel rooms almost always have a paper feedback form lying on a desk.

There are times when more specific feedback might be required for product development or strategic planning. An active approach such as a phone survey gives you greater control over the quality of data. However, some clients are more forthcoming when anonymous; others are reluctant to put their opinions in writing.

“Every disappointed customer will share their experience with 10 others.”

And one final tip: if you receive the glowing recommendation you deserve, make sure you get the client's written approval before using their name in your promotions.



Learning to Share at Work

The ease of sharing documents over email was a major advance over sending faxes or posting letters, but that convenience gave rise to other issues. When two or more people were working on a document - editing a sales proposal or a design brief, for example - it became very difficult to stay on top of the latest version.

Workarounds such as renaming the document (version 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc) or using Microsoft Word's 'track changes' function helped to manage the process but neither approach can completely avoid the danger of an older copy being mistaken for the latest version. The consequences can be amusing or costly if the wrong information is released to the public.

Thankfully there are better ways of working together, a term captured by IT marketers as 'collaboration'.

The best way to have several editors working on one document is to host a single version online. Document sharing services allow you to have a number of people registered to edit a document simultaneously - you can actually see the text appear in the document in real-time. The greatest advantage is that only one

version of the document exists, no matter how many edits are made.

Version control is not the only benefit. Using a single document reduces the number of files floating around your firm, which cuts down storage and backup requirements, network speed and general administration.

“The best way to have several editors working on one document is to host a single version online.”

Hosting documents online also saves you paying for the hard drives and servers to store them yourself. And because documents hosted online can be accessed using an internet browser like Microsoft Explorer or Firefox, you can view, edit or print your documents at any computer or mobile device connected to the internet.

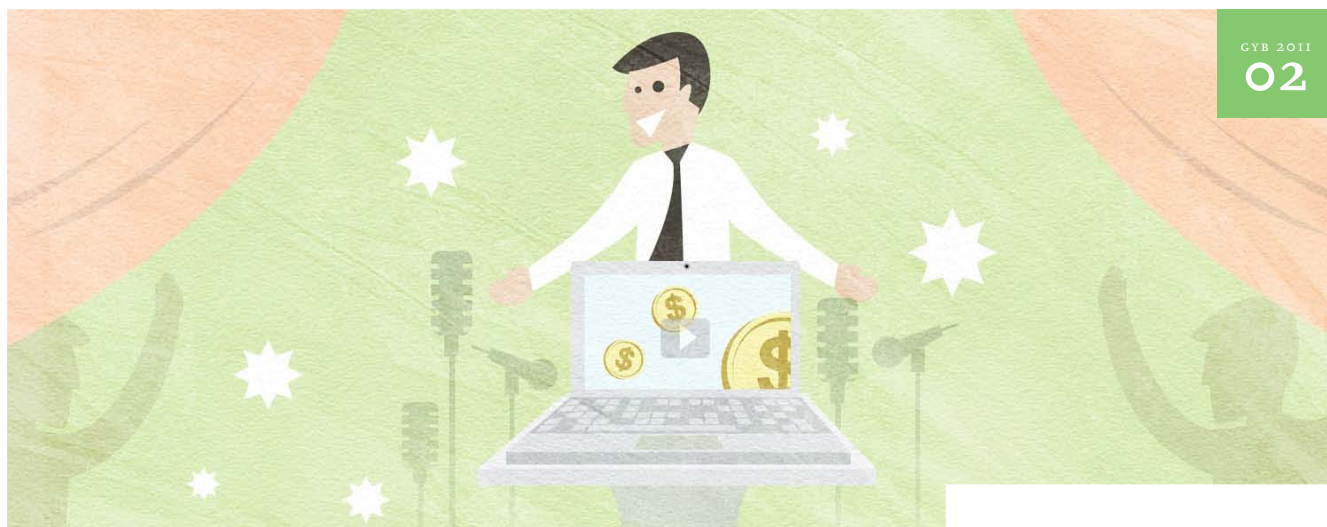
You might prefer to sync a folder of online documents to a hard drive in your office for peace of mind. However, these services

always keep backups of all documents in several data centers many miles apart - sometimes on different continents.

GOOGLE VS MICROSOFT

Google was one of the pioneers of the collaboration approach through its Google Docs platform. Google Docs also has a track changes function but with a twist; called 'revision history'. Edits are colour coded and displayed in a vertical timeline with the option to restore a version at any point. Google has made it very easy to add editors to a word processing document, spreadsheet or presentation. A 'share' button lets you invite people to view or co-edit the document.

Microsoft has released an internet-based add-on to its ubiquitous Microsoft Office productivity suite that accomplishes a similar objective. The software giant is launching a fully online version of Microsoft Office this month called Microsoft 365 that will better address online collaboration.



The Power of Video Marketing

Television commercials are considered the most effective advertising method, reflected in the high prices commercial stations charge for running one. This is not just because a lot of people watching TV will see the ad - the medium itself engages more senses than radio or print and can make a greater impact on viewers.

The internet has made it possible for firms to avoid the hassle and expense of television networks by screening video commercials themselves. Your firm's website is a channel of information that your clients will seek out to learn about the products or services you sell.

BRAINSTORMING

You can use a video to show satisfied clients recommending your firm; demonstrate a product in action; or use music and images to create an emotional connection with potential clients that will encourage them to buy. One of the most popular video categories are 'how to' guides. A list of the most common questions fielded by your sales or support staff may offer inspiration.

Unlike a television commercial, you can make the video as long as necessary or host a series of videos. If your video is amusing or impressive in some way, it can 'go viral' and receive enormous amounts of traffic, with ensuing publicity.

A growing trend among new software companies is to show nothing else on their home page but an introduction video that explains in simple terms why the software is worth using. This direct method of communicating with potential clients is far more engaging than filling the page with detailed explanations of the software's features and pricing.

HOSTING

Firms can host a video on their website itself but this can be technically challenging. If your firm's website receives a spike in visitors - in response to a sale or over Christmas, for example - your video might take too long to load on visitors' computers.

There are several services which will host video for you with the ability to scale up

resources to make sure the video doesn't slow or stutter.

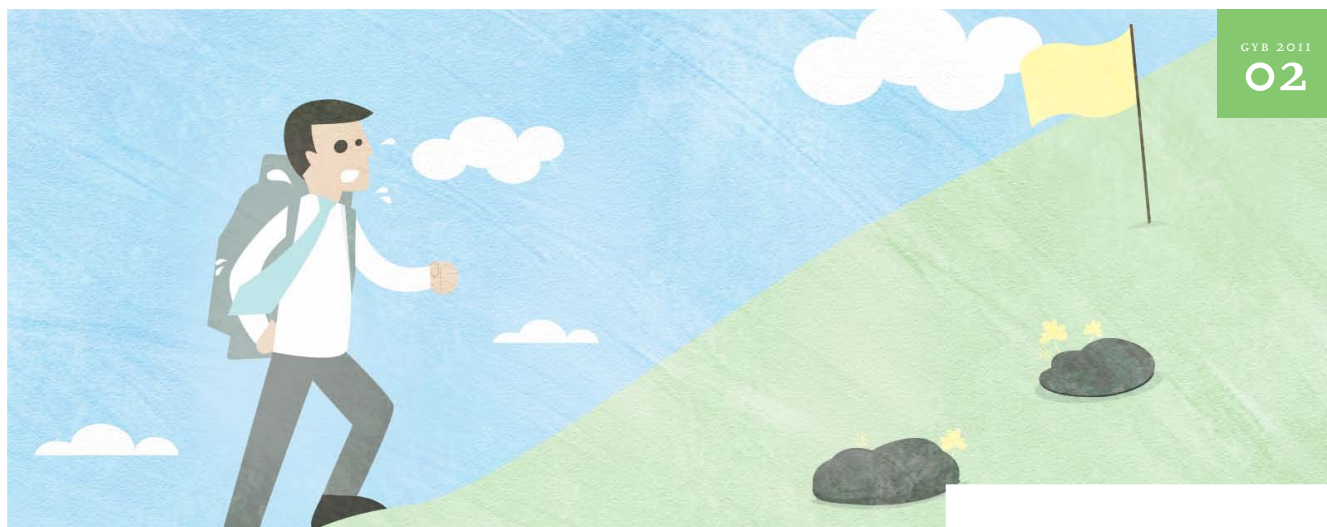
YouTube is by far the biggest and best known, but some may consider it inappropriate for hosting a business video that displays a YouTube logo.

Amazon Web Services (a division of the online shopping behemoth) can host video without any branding, but it requires more effort to set up. Once hosted, you can promote your video through social media sites such as Facebook.

PRODUCTION

The required tools for creating videos have become more affordable with prices of digital video cameras plummeting. Simple-to-use, high-definition units can be found for \$200.

But before you rush out and start filming, consider hiring an actor or a studio to help write the script and shoot the video for you. Done well, video is a very effective tool for marketing your firm. Done poorly and you could look unprofessional, cheap or worse.



The Best Way to Hire

Imagine you had a choice of hiring one of two candidates for your firm. The first had years of experience, was highly qualified and boasted a strong track record. The second was a junior player, ambitious yet untested.

Many firms wouldn't hesitate in choosing the former. But what if the older candidate was so sure of himself that he refused to listen to his superiors, mocked the mistakes of others and proved to be otherwise prickly and uncooperative?

A version of the phrase "hire on character, train for skills" is often quoted by experienced businessmen and women. On paper, firms may seem like a machine powered by team members who form the cogs and wheels. In reality, firms are social organizations that rely on a commitment to a common goal and a positive attitude to function at their best. This is why large corporations care so much about establishing a culture that closely identifies with its mission. The same is true of smaller firms.

When screening prospective team members, make sure you spend time explaining why you are in business.

Conveying a sense of purpose is at least as important as describing the way the firm functions. If a prospective team member shares your vision for the firm, they are more likely to work well alongside your other team members.

"In the interview, look for excitement and enthusiasm."

Recruiters recommend using behavioral traits as a guide to screening candidates. After writing a job description based on the activities required, write down the type of characteristics and traits a team member would require.

If the position is replacing a valuable team member, write down the outgoing team member's traits, skills and characteristics as a starting point. Make sure you include the behavioral characteristics in the text of the job posting.

In the interview, look for excitement and enthusiasm. If the candidate sounds bored by the prospect of taking the job, it's a safe bet that the job is not going to work out for either of you.

Although it sounds counter-intuitive, experience can even be a hindrance. Newer firms with unconventional approaches to their field can find that team members hired away from competitors are less keen to do something that contradicts their training. Instead those firms might do better hiring younger team members who are less set in their ways.

THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE

Air conditioning and heating can be a surprisingly large cost to firms. Ask team members to wear a jumper in the office during winter and lighter clothes in summer then adjust the thermostat to a less demanding setting. Just watch out for rogue heaters or fans under desks - they can send power bills spiraling.



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