

# 25 TIPS TO LEADING A NO BULLSHIT BUSINESS

 the big picture

*K Cardinal*

# the big picture

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## INTRO

Welcome to **the big picture**, an e-book you can count on, ensuring every detail of your business is Kick-Ass! IMD says it – we live it – and we help You achieve it. Along with **the big picture**, you can find more to “like” from Innovative Media & Design on Facebook, and be sure to enjoy our IMD Kick-Ass Behavior blog ([www.imdesign.me](http://www.imdesign.me)).

Now let’s get to it.

### Why **the big picture**?

In each chapter, you will gain insider business tips, tricks and insight all leading toward achieving success in business. Through personal stories and professional examples, learn precisely how marketing, branding, staffing and more all connect to your final product, Your Big Picture. *Feel inspired again about your business!*

### Who is IMD?

Innovative Media & Design is a team of professionals who love their work. We propel companies and create success stories through engaging design and marketing solutions. I am Kate Cardinali, owner of IMD, and I’m passionate about business endeavors – Kick-Ass ones, anyway!

### Why Kick-Ass?

Before going any further into this book, you must understand: Kick-Ass is a state of mind, a level of quality, and empowerment. At IMD, we feel there’s no point in dealing with anything less than Kick-Ass in any area of business. (And if you do, contact IMD. We’ve just identified a problem.)

**Bottom Line:** Read **the big picture**. Re-read it. Share it. Ensure you’re on the right path with these simple business models intended to help you re-think and further connect each business detail and decision into Your Big Picture. Remember: You didn’t set out in business to be good. *Be better than good.* Dare to Kick-Ass with **the big picture** and IMD!

Shoot for the moon.  
Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.

## THE POWER OF BRANDING

Skip the small talk.

We're hitting home with a topic that is *essential* to your company's success. Listen closely, now. The Power of Branding is *understanding* The Power of Branding.

**Branding is not:** Your product, your logo, your website, your colors, or your name.

**Branding is:** The image your company portrays to the public, and how your company is perceived as a whole. Branding is your business's personality.

Once established, every decision thereafter – your logo, website, colors and fonts, letterheads, brochures – should cohesively portray Your Brand and Your Identity, right down to the way your employees answer the phone to the code of dress at your company.

### **Branding Gone Wrong:**

- A fine wine retailer, with a cheap business card
- A company offering organization, but their website is cluttered and in disarray
- A serious-natured business with a whimsical logo and Easter-inspired company colors
- A single company that uses four or five (useless) logos, and can't understand why clients don't identify with their company

If reading this makes you realize you are not harnessing The Power of Branding, I recommend you start by firmly understanding Your Brand. Ask yourself:

- What is your company's mission?
- What are the benefits/features of your products/services/company that separate you from the competition?
- What qualities, emotions and feelings do you want customers to associate with your company?

**Bottom Line:** When each and every detail of your company cohesively portrays Your Brand, your clients' will know *who you are* and *what you offer* because you consistently represent it. The obvious mistake is missing out on the simple, yet strong, Power of Branding.

Brand is the 'f' word of marketing. People swear by it, but no one quite understands its significance.

## YOU CAN'T KICK-ASS WITH A NO-GO LOGO

Listen closely. Successful logos must create instant public recognition of your company and your brand. Period.

### No-Go Logos:

The wrong colors, forgettable design, brand inconsistencies – logos can fail miserably, or work quickly and continuously. Here's one company's early misfortune in the land of logos. My own. *Where was this e-book when I needed it?*

- **A Quickie:** I was young, just establishing myself, and eager to launch IMD quickly. I needed a logo, and I rushed it.
- **Lame Logo:** The original logo for Innovative Media & Design was intended to loosely portray pixels, as in graphic design. Get it? Neither did anyone else. (No Instant Public Recognition = Useless.)
- **No Matter Where You Go, There You Are:** My business cards, website, apparel, letterheads, signage all carried a logo that I strongly disliked.

You live and you learn. If your company has a No-Go Logo, it's time for a redesign. Consider this, as well. Some companies use logo redesigns as marketing strategy. Apple, for example, continuously refreshes their logo, Wendy's recently modernized theirs, etc. Enhancing and refreshing a logo can create a buzz, acting as a re-launch of sorts. This can be *very useful* for a company whose business has gone stale.

### Is Your Logo Working For You?

- **Symbolism:** Does your design *clearly* signify your company, your brand?
- **Font Choice:** Is it easily readable, and understandable?
- **Color:** Not simply colors you enjoy. Do your colors represent the nature of your company, your brand?

**Bottom Line:** Refreshing your logo can be costly and time-consuming, but using a logo that isn't working for you is *equally costly*. If your logo is not memorable – it's forgotten already. You can't Kick Ass with a No-Go Logo.

## GET BACK TO YOUR ROOTS

Is your business offering a little of everything? (Or rather – a whole lot of nothing.)

Companies add service lines for a multitude of reasons, and sometimes it all works out. Other times – and often in a downward situation of plummeting numbers – businesses begin offering more and more and more. (Stop by this coffee shop and get your taxes done and your hair styled while you wait. What?)

The result: Customers are often overwhelmed – and *underwhelmed* – and end up at Starbucks where they know they'll get what they went for.

Wading in the pool of “a little of everything”? It may be time to take a step back, reevaluate and Get Back to Your Roots:

- **Review Your Mission.** Literally, review your company's mission statement. Figuratively, examine as a whole whether your company is doing what it set out to do. *Are you achieving the goals you've set, both short-term and long-term?*
- **Know When to Fold 'Em.** I often remind clients that pulling back a service line that isn't progressing as planned is not a sign of failure. On the contrary, it's a sign of staying on task with the details of your business – a key component of success. *Is there an area of your business that is not progressing?*
- **Next Step.** There will always be opportunities to add service lines, to grow, to attempt another goal or vision for your company. Keep your ambitions in line with your mission at every next step. *Are you planning your next step even as we speak? Will it promote your mission?*

**Say What?** If your company does not have a mission statement—stop everything. Write one. Now. *What separates your company from the pack? What are you looking to provide, short and long term?*

**Bottom Line:** Do what you do and do it well. Continuously get back to your roots to ensure your company grows steadily. (And, by all means, don't get your hair done at a coffee shop.)

Sometimes the first step in moving forward is taking a step back.



## GOT GOALS?

What are your company's **goals**?

Setting and achieving goals is crucial to the success of any company. Goals provide a structured framework for your business – achieve X goal by X time. They also serve as a measuring tool in gauging your company's hits and misses. Did we achieve this goal, and did achieving it produce the desired effects?

Three-month goals, six-month goals, one-year goals, five-year and beyond. Smaller goals are ideally the stepping stones toward achieving larger goals, i.e., making 10 cold calls weekly toward the larger goal of tripling your client base in one year. All goals should lead to your ultimate goal: "I will retire a millionaire at age 40". (Lofty you say? Hey, *you've got to have goals!*)

Gauge Your Goals:

- **Identify Areas for Improvement.** What worked? What didn't? Look at budget, marketing strategies, client base. Did you plan properly for your year, and spend effectively? Did sales dip, or soar? When, and why?
- **Goal Plan.** Will you be attending conferences, meetings, etc.? What is the goal of attending the event? Have you worked airfare, registration fees and hotel accommodations into your budget?
- **Contemplate a SWOT Analysis:** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). This is a formulated way of looking at your company, and seeing intricate details sometimes overlooked in day-to-day operations. If you've never done a SWOT, take the opportunity to dive in! (Thank IMD later. You'll see.)

**Bottom Line:** Know your goals. Keep focused on who and what you want your company to be. Set your small and large goals, and achieve them—the ultimate Kick-Ass goal.

Setting goals is the first step in  
turning the invisible into the visible.

## NICE TO MEET YOU, AGAIN

Have I told you, lately?

Some clients are consistent, others intermittent – it’s the nature of the game. But whether you work closely with a client or it’s been awhile, don’t leave anyone in the dust as your company evolves and adds new services. You may very well have a client eager for something you offer... who doesn’t know you offer it.

Case in point: On the phone with a client IMD has worked with consistently for some time, our conversation went like this:

*IMD: “What’s on your agenda for today?”*

*CLIENT: “Nothing much, just waiting for the graphics on our company trucks to be installed. We’ve been waiting for over a month now.”*

*IMD: “Oh yeah? You should have let me know. We could have handled that for you, and probably for a better price.”*

*CLIENT: “Really? I didn’t know you offered that!”*

In the end, IMD provided our client’s graphics within the week, for a better price – and learned a valuable lesson: Don’t just assume that clients are familiar with *all* of your service lines. Take time to educate and re-educate your clients about all of the services your business provides.

- **It’s Been Awhile.** Send a catch-up mailer now and again, an email, or even make a few phone calls. Take the opportunity to continually reintroduce your company to clients you haven’t worked with in a while, and educate them about what you offer now. *Think efficient, and noticeable: How will you inform your clients about your current service lines?*
- **Did You Know?** As the conversation exchange above points toward, even close clients may not be familiar with all of your services. Keep them informed, too, and keep them coming to you. *How will you feel if your client goes to a competitor?*
- **No, I Didn’t See That.** Don’t rely solely on social media to market your services. While you can analyze the number of people who see your posts, you cannot specify who. *How will you ensure that clients receive your information?*

**Bottom Line:** Keep your clients informed and educated about your services. Help them connect the dots from what they already know about your company... to *all* they will come to love.

The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra.



## WAIT FOR IT

Kicking back, waiting to make your move? Smart cookie.

You see, that creative, kick-ass mailer your company just sent out – great! But that’s only one touch. Statistically, it takes *7 touches before company recognition takes hold*, or before your company/product will be remembered and a prospect may take action. Don’t jump the gun. Build momentum – and gain solid recognition – through *multiple touches* before contacting.

What’s that you say?

You’re aware of the 7-touch statistics, and in a systematically chosen timeframe of three weeks to three months, your company has engaged *direct mail, social media, word of mouth, email* – and that’s your *billboard* prospects keep seeing while driving through town (and your *ad* in the magazine, too)? Nicely done!

Now, don’t blow it.

Follow up (otherwise all of your work to engage recognition was a wa\$te), and carefully consider the timing of your follow-up:

- **Speak. In a Week.** Verbal contact is crucial. Call prospects after multiple touches, and within 7 – 10 days of them receiving your send-out.
- **Is This A Good Time?** Consider the timing of your phone call based on your prospect. People are often hectic and hurried on Mondays, and preoccupied on Fridays. (But if the business you’re calling operates Thursday – Monday, Thursday is their hectic Monday.) Think about your prospective client’s setting, hours of operation and availability before calling.
- **Pay Attention.** Take notes that this client was called, on this date, and this response was requested. If a client says to call back at 2 p.m. on Tuesday – make note of that as well, and do so!
- **Don’t Be a Bother.** If you’re getting no response, or they are too busy, sit back a bit. Call them in 4 - 6 weeks to check in or to set up a meeting on their time. After that, if there’s still no interest, let it go.

**Bottom Line:** Have you ever “blown it” due to timing, *watched a marketing campaign sink because you jumped the gun*? Be mindful of your timing when reaching out to clients and prospects. Wait For It, and build recognition. Wait For It, follow up with finesse. Wait For It – and Ensure It.

## HOT MARKETING

Say it with me: The Sea of Sameness Sucks.

(Repeat until it sinks in.)

Look, I'm not bashing catalogs or saying they don't have a place in the market. They do. What I *am* saying is – don't be afraid to switch it up a bit! Step outside of the traditional marketing platform. Rather than sending 5,000 catalogs (like you've done for years), send out 2000 catalogs with a Kick-Ass item included... in a box that beckons to be opened... and **Get Noticed!**

Because the recycle bin looms.

Because you have mere seconds to grab attention, and the competition is stiff.

And because the sea of sameness sucks – but your company doesn't.

Get a piece of some **Hot Marketing** action, and **Get Noticed:**

- **White, White, Blah, White, RED!** Think of your envelope as a silent salesperson, and put something as simple as a pop of color to work for you. Get Noticed.
- **Things that make you go HMMM.** Another flier – woo. But who can resist a *box*? Or a bulky letter with *something* inside? It sounds simple, and it is. Get Noticed.
- **Factor in the WOW Factor.** Think different, think WOW, and think relevant to your company. (Hint: A pen would have to fly to be WOW.)

**Bottom Line:** What is one thing you could do to *blow your competitors out of the water*? What is something you could send out that your customers will *remember*? Now you're thinking...and now you're on your way to Hot Marketing = Get Noticed. Kick-Ass!

## YOUR LOST IF YOU'RE NOT "LIKED"

Here's a tip: Social Media only works if you understand how it works, and execute it correctly.

Done well, social networking is LESS about immediate buying/selling and MORE about being friendly and available to your client base. It's every business' opportunity to become "the friendly spot down the road" that customers frequent because they feel they *know* the company and *like* the way they do business.

Do you give your customers the chance to *know you*, become *friends*? The viable marketing approach behind social networking is seamless, if you understand it. *Friends* like each other. *Friends* think of your business first, and tell *friends* about it. *Friends* buy your products.

### Be Social: Make Friends

- **Show Personality.** Introduce your team. Post photos of your staff around the office. Let your clients get to *know* you, and your company.
- **Offer Advice.** Launching a new wine, or a new brew? Offer a delicious pairing your clients can try. Offer tips on storing the wine, the ideal temperature to keep the brew at. Remind customers that you have banquet halls for personal gatherings.
- **Ask Questions.** Get to know your *friends* better. What's their favorite way to utilize your product? Consider hosting a contest – a great way to create a buzz, and possibly grab testimonial toward favorite uses of your product. Highlight a favored customer, or loyal client.
- **Photos** – Photos speak volumes quickly, and are great "storytellers". A photo of your family's winery celebrating the holidays in 1908 offers a piece of your heritage. An endearing photo of friends enjoying your brewery's House Brew delivers an emotion of joy attached to your product. Photos say a lot, and your customers will feel that.

**Bottom Line:** Do you understand your opportunity with Social Media? Letting customers *know* and *like* your company can create many lasting relationships, if executed correctly.

Kind words can be short and easy to speak,  
but their echoes are truly endless.



## WHAT THE HELL, FACEBOOK?

We “like” seeing you here.

Have you noticed a decline in FB insights? Did the January 2014 mega-change in FB algorithm leave your company’s FB site less-traveled, and less seen? Is the now ever-changing algorithm making you feel like FB is a mind-boggling waste of time? We know.

But, listen. With revenue in 2013 of \$6,150,000,000 and approximately 1,310,000,000 billion users who spend about 640,000,000 minutes per month at the site, Facebook is still an incredibly viable method of building connections, “like” it or not.

### Tip: Utilize FB Effectively.

- **You Get What You Pay For.** At this point, it is *strongly advised* that you pay for some sponsored posts, or boost posts. (Let’s be honest. Facebook was never truly free, anyway. It sounded good, but time spent is still \$.)
- **It Is What It Is.** The result FB seeks from the ever-changing algorithm: Pay to be seen or get lost in the billion-user-shuffle. Yes, *billion*. Your posts, photos and intentions to reach out simply won’t be seen at this point unless you pay for it. \$et up a budget each week or month, and boost those posts.
- **Stop Wasting Time.** Don’t spend quality time on FB posting photos and comments, and then leave it to chance that your efforts are worthwhile. Look at the insights! If you’re not tracking your FB insights, you’ll never know how well (or not well) your business is doing at reaching your intended audience.

**Bottom Line:** What the hell, Facebook? You’ve mastered the mix to make a “free” site cost money, yet still remain an extremely worthwhile marketing option for businesses. I have to say it – that’s pretty Kick-Ass (“like” it or not).

Quality is never an accident.  
It is always the result of intelligent effort.

## BUSINESS CARDS THAT BRING BUSINESS

When someone hands me a flimsy, low-quality business card... I honestly look elsewhere.

A successful business card is, indeed, a marketing tool for showcasing your skill set and contact information. More so, however, your business card is the physical representation a client carries of YOU. (Read it again.)

Would a sturdy, dependable individual really have a cheap, flimsy business card? Could a company honestly execute your details, when they represent themselves with a low-quality card?

Don't overlook the impact a business card carries:

- **Quality.** I can't say enough about this, from choice of material (cardstock, plastic, wood, etc.) to ink selection. Choose quality. Period. *Be honest – how's the quality of the card you're relying on? Please don't say flimsy...*
- **Design.** Keep it simple. Ensure it represents the nature of your company. *At first glance, does the design relay the nature of your company?*
- **Creativity.** Make it memorable. *Is there anything unique about your business card?*

**Bottom Line:** Small cards. Big impact. If you want business cards that bring business, don't overlook the details that will assure your clients about You and Your Company.

It is easier to do a job right than to explain why you didn't.



## EYES WIDE OPEN

Does your company have an email newsletter? Are you reaching out to your current clients?

Let's begin here first: **WHY** is email marketing even important? Pay attention, now. Picture a large room, jam-packed with people listening to a speaker.

"Who here has a Twitter or LinkedIn account?" *A few hands go up.*

"Who uses Facebook?" *A lot of hands go up, more than half.*

"Who here has an email address?" *Every hand in the audience goes up. Every hand. 100%.*

Want to reach clients, and potential clients? Email marketing. But it only works if you can Kick (some email marketing) Ass! Read on, and learn **HOW** email marketing should operate:

1. **Catchy Subject Line:** Short, enticing subject lines are crucial. The rule of thumb is three – eight words, never more than eight. (One of our favorite subject lines thus far for the big picture: Cover Your...Assess Your Spending.)
2. **Enticing Intro:** Once readers open the email, a well-crafted "teaser" intro (Tip: 25 words is the sweet spot) should Grab their attention and Entice them to...
3. **CLICK HERE:** And end up reading the information – *Where?* At Your Website.

Bam!

The catchy subject, the enticing intro – the *point* of successful email marketing – is to draw readers away from their inbox and over to Your Website. **WHY?** Once at your website, the higher the likelihood is of visitors perusing a bit, getting to know more about your company – and ultimately realizing how Kick-Ass you really are!

**Bottom Line:** **WHY** is email marketing viable? Because *everyone* has an email. **HOW** should email marketing operate? It should *catch* attention, *entice* readers to want to click, and *draw* them to your website for compelling information. *Do you have an email newsletter? Is your company reaching out to clients?* Eyes Wide Open: It's time for your business to Kick (some email marketing) Ass!

## DRIVE TRAFFIC TO YOUR SITE

Build a website, and they will come? Hardly.

THEY WILL NOT COME unless you systematically drive people to your website, and put forth the effort needed to do so. Remember: Your website is your company's most valuable, personalized asset in welcoming and gaining clients, and informing them specifically about Your Kick-Ass Company.

Want people to visit your site, and learn more about your company?  
(No brainer: Yes.)

Learn What Drives Traffic to Your Site:

- **Social Media:** Your Facebook page is *not* your website. (Repeat that statement, please.) Social media allows chances built relationships, post photos, offer promotional items, and even tell a good success story. But the ultimate goal of social media is larger than being "liked". Look at the big picture – utilize social media to drive traffic to your website as it is intended. *Uh oh – have you gotten caught up in social media, and forgotten its true intention of bringing folks to your website? Been there.*
- **Email Newsletters/Blog:** This is twofold. Newsletters and blogs are valuable forms of ever-changing content for your website, which, in turn, promotes search engines finding you – and ultimately drives traffic to your site. Equally important, however, is that your company's newsletters and blogs are executed properly, and draw readers from social media sites and inboxes to your website as intended. *Do you have a newsletter? What compels people to want to open your newsletter?*
- **Forge Hard Links:** The more places your website is linked, the more places you will be found by search engines and by visitors. For example, if you are a winery – you may consider building a link on your site to a restaurant who carries your top-selling wines, and asking the restaurant to add your company's link on their website. (IMD has our website linked on multiple sites of companies we've worked with. Whether their company is searched or ours, IMD's website still comes up – bettering our chances of driving people to our site.) *Think fast – how many places can people get to your website from?*
- **SEO:** Utilizing heavily-searched key terms throughout your web content (based on your industry) can certainly drive traffic to your site, but there is much more to SEO than keyword researching and phrasing. Off-page submissions, Google AdWords... In truth, ensuring your website is optimized for SEO should be done by a professional. *Have you had a thorough analysis of your SEO performed recently? Are you covering your SEO bases? Is it time to contact a professional?*

**Bottom Line:** Your website cannot showcase Your Kick-Ass Company if no one visits it. Drive traffic to your site – or your visitors will traffic other sites that put forth the effort to drive them there. *Build it and they will come? Hardly.*

Happiness lies in the joy of achievement  
and the thrill of creative effort.



## UPDATE: YOUR WEBSITE

Driving traffic to your website is the ultimate goal of email marketing, social media, blogging, newsletters, etc. But once people get there – *what impression will your website give?*

Times have changed, and technology is accelerating quickly. (Hint: If your website is older than three years, not only is it outdated – it is at risk.) While five years was once an acceptable deadline for web redesigns, *two to three years or less has become the norm.*

Is your website keeping up with today, or yesterday?

- **Updating/Maintenance.** You should be adding articles, a blog, a newsletter, or some form of evolving and changing content to your website at least twice a month. If you can't achieve this, hire a company that can.
  - \*Updating content on your website is important in keeping your website current, your visitors attracted, and search engines locating your site – but it won't stop hackers or improve outdated design.
- **Refresh.** Not only is technology, programming and coding changing quickly these days – the way people read and interact with technology is changing at lightning speed, too. (**Tip:** The huge banner that was once the mainstay in web design has fallen to the wayside. It's stale, and not a great impression...) A refresh often includes visual changes and a home page freshener, but templates and navigation may be able to remain. \*Refreshes are a good halfway option in between redesigns, as long as your technology is sound.
- **Redesign:** A website makeover from top to bottom, with new templates, features, functions, images, and the navigation is reconsidered as well.
  - \***Every two to three years, or less.** This may sound extravagant, but it isn't. We live in a fast-paced world, and technology moves even faster.

**Bottom Line:** Your website is often the first impression a buyer has of your business. While updates may feel like a hassle at times, ask yourself this: *If your website is stale and outdated, does your business appear stale and outdated, too?* Call IMD immediately if you're even wondering.





## SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW & LET THEM KNOW YOU

It's no secret: Customers have shut out traditional marketing. Ads and banners are becoming irrelevant. So what *do* customers relate to? Content Marketing. Why? It's as simple as this: People do business with people they know and trust. (Read it again, it's that important.)

Content marketing operates as the opportunity for businesses to reach out to and build their client base. Through compelling content in e-newsletters and/or blogs (also shared via social media), clients are presented with vital information – and they develop a vital connection with the company who sent it. According to the Roper Public Affairs, *seventy percent* of business decision makers say content marketing makes them feel closer to the sponsoring company.

**Watch it work:** Consider how content marketing assists an IMD client, a landscaping company.

- **Share What You Know:** This landscaping company shares invaluable knowledge with clients through an e-newsletter and blog. Passing along knowledge gained in over 20 years in the industry, along with a degree in horticulture, this client is able to offer his customers informative, interesting and helpful blogs and newsletters.
- **Let Them Know You:** “Mrs. Rose Blooms” notices the blog, “Winter Pruning Tips”, and thoroughly enjoys the information. She chooses to “opt-in” at the company’s website to receive more, similar information. (<--Opt-in opportunities are essential for content marketing. Inquire with IMD.) She finds herself drawn to the informative newsletter, and begins to look forward to it every week...as she also begins to trust both the information and the company sending it.
- **By You, Buy From You:** Thank goodness she found that trusty blog! When the time comes to purchase plants or enlist landscaping services, Mrs. Rose Blooms is going to work with said landscaping company because...all together now: People do business with people they know and trust.

**Bottom Line:** If your business isn't implementing some form of content marketing – through a company newsletter and/or blog, and sharing via social media – you are missing out on an invaluable relationship-building opportunity. People do business with those they know and trust. *So, what will you name your Kick-ass newsletter? What will you offer your clients? Will they enjoy it – will IMD enjoy it?*

All lasting business is built on relationships.



## GET TO KNOW YOUR RAVING FANS

Who are your raving fans?

Raving fans are clients that adore your company! They work continuously with you, offer positive testimonial and steadily refer business your way. (And admiration is flattering, no doubt. Pat on the back! Raving fans are a sign that your company is working in the right direction. )

But invest the time to understand *the source* of the admiration to ensure that your company *continues in the right direction*. What do these clients consider your strengths? What keeps them returning? How can you relay these strengths to attracting similar clients?

Get to know your raving fans! Not through an impersonal, mass email...Offer to take two or three valued clients to lunch or out for coffee, one-on-one. Be brief and considerate of their time – and listen. The feedback you receive can directly assist your company in attracting more clients that, like they do, value your company!

*You learn something every day if you pay attention.*

- **Why do they like your company?** Your products, your prices, your personality? Do they value your timeline, special events, promotions? Take notes. These are your company's strengths directly from a source that relies on them.
- **How did they learn about your company?** Word of mouth? A result of your marketing?
- **What do they refer your company for most?** Specifically.
- **Constructive criticism?** What could your company improve upon?
- **Ideas?** Is there a product or service your company could offer that would assist them?

**Bottom Line:** Get to know your raving fans. Invest the time to learn your company's strengths from first-hand sources. Market them to future clients – and be prepared to gain more raving fans!

## PREFERED

“Jane Smith told me about your company...” (We love Jane! Here’s why.)

**Think fast!** What is, hands-down, the most powerful and connective form of marketing? *The most powerful and connective form of marketing* is (drumroll, please): Word of Mouth. People *trust* word of mouth more than advertisements, and prefer advice from real people about real experiences rather than taking a gamble on unknown companies.

For example, imagine yourself walking by a sign that says, “We’re a great company! Hire us!” And you *walk by*. Now imagine that your friend/business associate, Jane, tells you, “I’ve worked with this company for years! If you’re looking for X, you’ll be very happy with the way they X, X and X.”

You do, indeed, need X, and Jane says this company is great...You *contact the company*. (Obviously, the second scenario is ideal.)

Looking to achieve *more* Word of Mouth? Implement Jane a.k.a. A Referral Program.

- **Finding Jane:** Some businesses build incentives for any/all customers to refer others (i.e. Direct TV Refer a Friend Program, receive \$10 off your bill). Others ask a key group of long-time, loyal clients to participate in their referral program. Generally, IMD recommends the latter. *How does your referral program work?*
- **Will you, Jane?** How do you ask a client to participate in your referral program? Ask them! Call them, send them a card, take them to lunch! Be clear that you appreciate and value their loyalty to your company, and you are hopeful that they will spread the word about your services to new and exciting prospects. *What’s your method for asking for participation in your referral program?*
- **Thank You, Jane:** Special discounts, rewards based on the number of referrals, gifts tailored specifically to your referring client – options abound, but the point remains the same: Rewarding clients for their referrals is *crucial*. Your referring clients have extended a favor for your company. Ensure they feel appreciated. *How do you show your appreciation to referring clients?*
- **You and Jane Both Gain:** A referral program is intended to systematically boost word of mouth and positive referrals about your company – while also creating opportunities to reward Jane (your loyal clients) for referring your company. It’s a win-win situation for both Jane and your company. *Is your referral program feeling win-win? If not, what needs to happen?*

**Bottom Line:** Word of Mouth is, hands-down, *the most powerful and connective form of marketing*. Systematically building a team of people willing to spread word of mouth about your company – is, hands-down, pREFERred.

There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.



## KICK-ASS CONFERENCING

What's the trick to Kick-Ass Conferencing? Two words: Relationship building.

IMD has attended many (many) conferences, both as vendors and attendees. We've seen the sad, lonely booths with the workers sitting around looking bored (snore). We've also experienced lively, interactive booths, observed keen companies and memorable giveaways – and we currently enjoy multiple business relationships forged *completely at conferences*.

Understand: Conferencing is less about immediate sealing-the-deal, and all about building relationships. Keep in mind these Kick-Ass Conferencing tips:

**Pre-Conference:** Ensure it's a good fit for your company. Talk with the host, get hard numbers.

- How many are attending, and how many are repeat guests? How is the event being promoted? Get names, and talk with seasoned vendors. Word of mouth is a strong indicator of the quality of a conference.
- Prepare & strategize. Consider working with a company (IMD, of course) to ensure quality signage, booth visuals, giveaways items – and a successful event.

**At The Conference:** This is NOT the time to sit around. Get off your derriere, and get noticed!

- Downtime? No problem – talk with the vendors! You never know who might need a service from that “friendly company they met at the conference”. *Where are they from? How did they hear about this conference?*
- Make eye contact. Be witty, creative, and personal. *How will people remember you after meeting you?*
- Don't rely solely on your giveaway. A giveaway is intended to remind the attendee of meeting your company. *What giveaway will represent your exchange at the conference?*

**Post-Conference:** Don't drop the ball. Follow through on following up.

- Build time to follow up promptly after the conference. *Do you have their addresses?*
- Follow up with attendees – and vendors. Hint: IMD does just as much business with vendors that we've met at conferences as we do attendees. *Will your follow-up be memorable? Will you offer discounts? Referrals?*

**Bottom Line:** Kick-Ass Conferencing is about building relationships. And (sorry, not sorry) building a relationship with IMD will help your company enjoy Kick-Ass Conferencing!

The richest people in the world look for and build networks, everyone else looks for work.



## SECRETS OF SMASHING OPEN HOUSES

What's worse than attending an open house where everything is thrown together last-minute, and guests feel secondary?

Nothing.

Whether you're hosting an open house for a grand opening/new location, release of a new service line or just to welcome folks in for a visit – keep in mind that the essence of any open house is to *extend gratitude to your clients and welcome guests to your company.*

IMD's essential details to hosting a “smashing” open house:

- **Venue.** While “the more the merrier” is generally the accepted rule for open houses, do take into account how many can comfortably visit in the space you're hosting the event.
- **Timeline.** Underestimating the time necessary and details involved in hosting an open house results in a thrown-together, awkward event. Planning should begin *8 - 10 weeks prior* to the date – designing invitations, readying the guest list and contacting vendors. Mail and email invitations *three weeks prior* to the event, mention your open house in your company newsletter and via social media as well. Friendly reminder emails should be sent *72 hours before the event.*
- **Food/Drinks.** Remember: The goal of your open house is to “wow” your guests with gratitude, and a few chintzy chips and cookies on a paper plate hardly does so. Also keep in mind the opportunities to forge connections with local vendors, caterers and entertainers via your open house.
- **Memorable.** The goal is to ensure your guests enjoy themselves while promoting what is attractive specifically about your company, and offering your clients an event that they'll remember. A laid-back ambiance, gourmet selections, and take-home gifts allow guests to feel showered with gratitude and to have a good time!
- **Thank You.** Not only is it important to talk with each and every person at the open house, but sending a personal ‘thank you’ card afterwards speaks volumes in appreciation.

**Bottom Line:** Your company would cease to exist without your clients. Behind the scenes of smashing open houses are the critical details that, together, ensure guests and clients experience your gratitude. *Gratitude is the best attitude – how do you show it?*

Gratitude is the best attitude.



## BORING OFFICES SHOULD BE BANNED

We've all worked in offices that were grey and boring, and not only did they look blah – but they felt dismal, too. (Honestly, just talking about it makes me *shudder*.)

Because that's exactly what coming to work feels like, then. Boring. Lifeless. Depressing. Nobody wants to actually work, no sparks are firing... Tick tock... tick tock... is it 5 o' clock yet? (*Shudder again*.)

A creative space is just as important as a strong business plan. Your company cannot function without your employees, and if you want your employees at peak performance, driven to work and loving the work they do – Create Office Spaces to Create In.

IMD's office is purposely energetic, detail-oriented, and downright fun! My employees often remark how much they love coming to work – the space they come to each day *encourages that*.

Take a peek inside IMD, and get the creative juices flowing for (and in) your office space:

- **Think About It:** Here, there and everywhere – our office is full of quotes, from vinyl on our walls to personal writings on our huge chalkboard wall. These words pull creativity out of us (and our visiting clients), while reminding us to “Work in silence. Let success be your noise.” and to “Make It Matter.” *What do your employees see, daily, to produce thought?*
- **Color Me Happy:** Our IMD signature colors, turquoise and red, pop throughout our space! The office feels bright, lively and energetic from the color of the walls to the art on our walls. Color sets the stage for the feel of our office (and, consequently, how employees feel inside IMD). *What does the color of your office promote?*
- **DeLIGHTful:** Yes, even lighting can be inspirational. Our lights were created by an artist who recycles objects into lighting. Red wire, industrial pipe, oxygen tanks tops that hang overhead – we often talk about our noticeable lighting with clients, and it acts as both a daily reminder of an artist's creativity-at-work as well as functional lighting. *Have you considered the lighting in your office?*
- **Go With The Flow:** IMD's office has five signature zones that blend together easily into one Kick-Ass space. We considered carefully how the office would operate best – and set to work ensuring our Welcome Area/ Entrance Desk flows easily into the Work Stations. Our Conference Area is situated conveniently next to our Organizational Area (with printers, files and storage easily at hand). And My Desk... is in the middle of it all, simply stated with large photos of my world adorning the wall. *Does your office flow well?*

You have to breed creativity to achieve it.





- **Welcome To Wow:** Clients are greeted to our IMD Welcome Area with a vibrant red couch and matching white chairs that pull people in visually, and welcome them with comfort to stay all day. This space is also an extension of Employee Workstations – anytime – because sometimes lounging about a comfy couch inspires creativity more than cramping at a desk. *What do visitors see upon entering your office?*
- **You. Just You:** We have a sprinkling of one-of-a-kind pieces that solely represent IMD: Our letterpress table, created by myself and IMD employee Hanna (and constructed by my brother, Jake); our corkboard maps displaying IMD travels, created by my husband Jeremy; our chalkboard, always filled with fun, personal messages; and let's not forget our Ms. Pac Man machine. (Does every office need an arcade machine? No. But, c'mon. *It's pretty sweet.*)

**Bottom Line:** Regardless of the nature of the business, creating a space where creativity can flourish is essential. No office should feel dismal, boring, or lifeless – or the minds working there will be.

## A FAIR SHAKE

Are you put off by a weak handshake? I am.

A handshake should be a quick gesture that says, “I’m engaged, I’m assertive, I’m professional. You can count on me.” Whether it’s the first greeting or the final seal-the-deal handshake – *immediate and lasting judgments are made in those few seconds.*

Project confidence with your handshake, and put your clients at ease:

- **Make eye contact.** Always.
- **Recognize.** Repeat the name of the person you are shaking hands with. “Nice to meet you, Jane.” “Sounds like a plan, John.”
- **You First.** Especially if you are female, and the client is male – in the business world, men often wait until a woman extends her hand first. Man-to-man, or woman-to-woman, offering the first hand is a sign of confidence.
- **Keep it brief.** A lingering handshake becomes awkward quickly. A few seconds does the trick.
- **Firm is good. Pain is not.** Not only do you appear extremely overeager, but it’s just...painful.
- **Lame is Lame.** The worst of handshakes, in my opinion, is a limp, wimpy handshake. It makes me feel like the person is either not interested, or not *interesting.*

**Bottom Line:** A handshake goes a long way. It’s a small gesture, with a large impact. Always offer your clients a fair shake.



## CREATING A STRONG TEAM

I once hired a friend...and I had to *fire* a friend. Not pretty. You live and you learn. I made, what I now know to be, crucial mistakes:

- **I hired a friend.** Okay, not necessarily. But, if you do hire a friend/family member, don't fool yourself into believing that everyone (or anyone?) can separate business and friendship.
- **I hired someone with no experience.** Enough said.
- **I hired someone I had doubts about.** This is crucial. Don't fill a position – ever – unless you believe they will succeed. I wanted to believe that my friend could handle the pace, workload and details of my growing business...but I had my doubts. In the end, she was beyond overwhelmed, and I had betrayed my own gut instinct. Everyone felt like a failure.
- **I jeopardized my work atmosphere.** As things went south with my friend, and tensions rose in the office, my whole staff was miserable. Coming to work felt like a chore. Major mistake.

That's what didn't work. What does?

- **Create a Strong Team.** I maintain a highly positive environment at IMD. A potential employee can look great on paper – great education, top-notch quality of work – but if they can't take a joke, or tell a joke, they don't belong in my office. (We break into occasional dance around here...)
- **Know Your Team Members.** *There's a huge difference between a bad employee, and an employee having a bad time.* Touch base, continuously. I've lent many a' listening ear, shoulder to ease a burden – and my team is close because of that. I'm never too busy to touch base.
- **Let Them Thrive.** I absolutely love what I do, and I only surround myself with people who feel the same. Know where your employees will succeed. Let salespeople sell, writers write and organizers organize. If they love what they do, they'll *want* to work.

**Bottom Line:** Creating a Strong Team – with people who are passionate about their work – is an essential element of any truly successful business, and definitely a Kick-Ass one! *Did reading this make you feel like patting yourself on the back, or hiding in your closet? Are you an asset to your team?*



## ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES REALLY HAPPY?

Point to Ponder: Your employees are walking, talking billboards for your company – the good, the bad (the ugly).

I discovered this truth during an uncomfortable conversation with an employee (who works for a company I whole-heartedly love) as she systematically pointed out why working for that company *wasn't that great...* Now, imagine this disgruntled employee yapping into the ears of fellow employees at the company picnic, or having a glass of wine and spewing her unhappiness with *your* company to *anyone* who will listen!

Look, if employees don't give a crap about their job, or feel that their employer doesn't give a crap about them – expect crappy results. I firmly believe that employees cannot put in 110% if they don't love what they do. At IMD, I consistently have employees say, "I love my job! Thank You!"

I'm not bragging. I work hard to ensure their happiness.

### How do you keep your employees happy?

- **Care.** Whether you oversee 1 employee or 100,000 or more, look your employees in the eye. Ask about their weekend, their kids or families. You have NO company without them.
- **Communicate.** I tell my employees never to be afraid to talk with me, and I mean it. Whether they need time off or an ear to listen, I *find* time to communicate. My employees know this.
- **Recognize.** Happy employees will go above and beyond, take ownership of their tasks and feel pride in completing them to the best of their abilities. Never miss an opportunity to recognize a "job well-done".

**Bottom Line:** Your company invests in effective advertising. Think of your employees as walking, talking billboards for your company. *How's your advertising campaign going?*

Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers.



## FORECAST: SUNNY WITH A CHANCE OF LOW MORAL

Be honest. We all have those days.

Maybe the weather is especially wonderful, or the beach just beckons louder for some reason, or visitors are in town...

Who wants to be at work on those days??

I'm no different than any other employee. A day at the office sometimes pales in comparison to *outside*. I, too, crave long weekends, barbeques, vacations...I'm sorry. Was I saying something? My mind wandered off to the beach where my friends are at, and I'm here at work.

**What can you do** to keep morale above "sigh"? Show your employees that you respect their work-life balance, and soften the blow of those workdays.

- **Flexible Scheduling.** Is *telecommuting* is an option? What about working four 10-hour shifts for Fridays off? Perhaps a long evening or two, with a half-day Friday option?
- **Offer Rejuvenation.** Any employee will beam upon hearing, "You've worked hard all week. Why don't you head out at 3:00 today?" An extra jump on that "long weekend" (and a bit of gratitude for it) reminds employees *why* they enjoy working for you in the first place.
- **Up the Fun Ante.** Company picnics, longer lunch breaks, casual Fridays. These are cliché for a reason. Fridays in jeans *are* somehow less painful, a tasteful company picnic *does* promote pride in one's company, an impromptu meeting at a coffee house *is* better than the old board room for a change.

**Bottom Line:** Your employees have gardens, and children and actual lives outside of work! They've shown up rather than playing hooky. Recognize this when you can. *Are you afraid to let a little fun in, or do you consider fun part of functional in your office?*

The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play.



## THIS DEAL IS DONE.

Have you ever worked with a client that was *sucking the life out of you*?

IMD is all for going the extra mile to ensure client satisfaction – even the cranky ones. Kill them with kindness, sure. But not to the point that it is *killing you*.

**A quick story:** I was in the thick of it, designing a website. This difficult client presented ever-changing visions, 20-item daily re-do needs and absolutely unrealistic expectations regarding timeframe. I was working like crazy (far over my proposed hours), losing money *and completely unhappy*. This business relationship needed to end. I sent them a letter, tactfully referred them elsewhere and offered them a full refund.

You know this one, right? You can't please everyone, but you've got to please yourself.

It's never an easy decision, but it may be time to cut ties if:

- You and your client are continuously butting heads
- You are unable to come to agreements, large and small
- There is little or no compromise
- Your client is not taking your professional advice
- You are miserable, and see no way to ensure satisfaction

If you've done everything you can, yet no one is satisfied – refer the client with professionalism to others that provide your service, end the relationship and save your sanity.

**Bottom Line:** Sometimes the only way to deal with a difficult client is to declare: This Deal is Done.

*\*By the way, the above-mentioned difficult client... contacted IMD six months later. After trying two other companies – with no success – they had to reexamine their expectations and tactfulness. IMD took the project back on, and blew them away with their amazing website!*

Shake off the snake and live your life with maximum impact.



## WE'RE SPENDING HOW MUCH?!

Okay, so you've been with this vendor for years. But are you still getting the best price? When was the last time you checked? IMD is all for building relationships with vendors, but at the end of the day – *loyalty lies first and foremost with the client.*

Assess Your Spending:

- **Don't Be Lax.** There's a familiarity and comfort with using the same vendor year after year. But a *small increase* here, a *slight change* there over the years...adds up. Absorbing cost increases in any area directly affects the prices you can offer clients. Don't be lax about getting the best cost.
- **Get A Quote.** Check around, and guarantee that you are receiving the best cost. New businesses open, costs fluctuate. Can you get the same, or better, results for less? Getting alternative quotes will either: Give you peace of mind that you are in the right ballpark, or alert you that it's time to make some changes.
- **Tell It Like It Is.** Be upfront with vendors that you do regularly check around, and that you will go elsewhere to protect your clients' best cost. It's not rude – it's business competency. A vendor will think twice about trying to pull the wool over your eyes when they know your company shops around.
- **Question Why.** New year, new rates – I love that one. Why? Should a new year be an automatic chance to hike up prices? No one *has* to raise rates – it's a company choice. Question the validity, and don't simply accept price hikes.

**Bottom Line:** Getting the best cost is crucial. The end result is money saved that relays directly back to your client. *Loyalty lies first and foremost with the client.* IMD.

I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.



## BONUS: RESOLUTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Tip: **Plan** to re-read this at the beginning of each New Year for greater success.

The most straightforward and strategic resolution a business can make – *a resolution that will create solutions* – is this: **Plan**.

- **Plan Not to Fail.** Be leery of resolutions that lend themselves to failure. “I will triple my profits in the first quarter.” When you don’t – it’s over. Fail. Nothing has been accomplished. **Plan** achievable goals, and utilize them as stepping stones to conquering larger ones. “I will increase profits in the first quarter, and apply the profits to our marketing campaign which will...”
- **Plan Monthly.** New Year’s goals aren’t all executed in January – it’s a new year. **Plan** goals for each month, and **plan** deadlines to accomplish each goal. For example, July goals for IMD include Christmas preparations. Company travel, including accommodations, conferences booked throughout the year... all **planned** in November/December of the previous year.
- **Plan Cumulatively.** January’s plan to *Get More Organized* should ready February’s *Launch Marketing Campaign* leading into March’s goal to *Attain 20 New Clients*, etc. Build well-**planned** months into a year of well-**planned** successes.
- **Plan IMD.** I work with clients who find the above-mentioned nearly impossible, or can’t find the time to do so. Yet, flailing mid-year is never their intended **plan**. A recent client came to IMD – they had lost their company vision, and didn’t know which direction to take. A free business consultation later, and this company has a **plan**: Strategic monthly goals, a revised website in the works and a clear path. Kick-Ass! IMD is in the business of designing details, and propelling companies. **Plan** on it.

**Bottom Line:** Make a resolution that will create solutions. **Plan**. For Success. *Will you please email me your weekly, monthly, yearly, and five-year plans by the end of each January? Okay. Don’t. But you get the point. Plan. For Success. IMD.*

Good fortune is what happens  
when opportunity meets with planning.