

Little white lies are lies we tell that we think are harmless - but there are little white marketing lies some business owners believe that are doing more harm than good—keeping them from acknowledging and acting on the truth:

Lie #1 “We provide exceptional customer service.”

Wrong.

The truth is, most businesses are merely meeting customer expectations. Your clients **expect** to be treated like welcome guests. They expect for services and products to provide the results and performance you promised. They expect to feel as though they truly matter to your business.

But if nothing about the experience at your business is *outside of the expected order, beyond what was expected or better than the competition* in some way that is *meaningful to your clients*, you’re **not** providing exceptional, extraordinary or excellent customer service. At best, you are meeting expectations.

But don’t just take my word for it.

Take the results of a 2011 Customer Satisfaction Barometer, conducted by American Express:

- According to the study, **70%** of Americans said they would be willing to **spend almost 15% more** with businesses they believed (really) provided excellent customer service.
- With such an indicator, you’d think businesses would make customer service a top priority; but in the same survey, **60%** said they *don’t believe* businesses are making customer service a high priority.
- In fact, **26%** said they think businesses are actually paying **less attention** to service. Only **29%** of US consumers said that recent shopping experiences **exceeded** their expectations.
- Only **24%** of US consumers believe that you **value** their business and will **go the extra mile** to keep it.
- **48%** of those who said they would not pay more for good service said it’s because they expect good service, every time. (And why shouldn’t they?)

What most businesses should claim, instead, is that:

“Less than 1/3 of our customers think we provide exceptional customer service.”

Not quite so impressive, is it?



Elizabeth Kraus

Be InPulse branding • marketing & design

email: elizabeth@beinpulse.com

phone: 206-841-2191

website: www.12monthsofmarketing.com

Lie#2 “Our employees set us apart.”

Wrong.

At best, it’s a distinction without a difference. Why? *Every business* enjoys a unique employee culture because *no two businesses* have exactly the same make-up of people.

Your employees set you apart – so what? So does everyone else’s.

To stand behind the claim that your employees set you apart, you must be able to point to unique capabilities, characteristics, strengths or accomplishments in order to prove it. (And before you say, “our employees provide exceptional customer service,” please re-read the last little white marketing lie!)

Lie#3 “Word of mouth is our best marketing.”

Wrong.

Unfortunately, for most of the business owners making this claim it’s *technically* true— but only by default. Because what most are really saying is that they have no idea what else – if anything – in their marketing mix is producing any results. Or worse, because word-of-mouth marketing is actually the only form of marketing they’re engaging in.

And even that’s a little white marketing lie because (1) **‘you’** can’t do word of mouth marketing. *By definition*, your customers do it for you and you have no control over whether or how it occurs—hardly strategic! And (2) your clients ***are not*** going to walk out of your business and tell other people about you **unless and until you give them something to talk about!**

Most business owners who make this claim are engaging not in word of mouth marketing, but in “**accidental marketing.**” To give you an idea of how effective this is as a marketing strategy, let me ask:

- Would you engage in “accidental bookkeeping,” hoping that customers would still pay you (and pay the right amount) without setting prices or giving them a bill?
- Accidental accounting or tax reporting? Accidental, random purchasing? Accidental daily opening or closing procedures?
- Would you provide services to your clients by accident – without consultation to find out what they need, without education, and without strategy?

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website: www.12monthsofmarketing.com



Lie#4 “Service providers aren’t good at product sales.”

Wrong.

Selling the right products to your clients **is your responsibility**; you may be the only person who will fully assess problems and know how to solve them. Selling the right products to your customers—prescriptively—gives them the best chance to meet their short and long-term goals. **And maybe best of all:** Selling products that perform as promised makes you the authority, keeps you on the client’s mind, and gives them a reason to return.

**To sell more retail, you have to build client trust.
To build client trust, you have to sell more retail!**

What’s needed is a change of mindset, a change of how the retail game is played, and new tools that can do the selling work on your behalf.

Lie#5 “Our customers love us.”

Wrong.

This lie is especially dangerous. When you begin to believe that your customers love you more than you need, want and demonstrate that you truly love your customers, you’re in trouble. You’re just a hop, skip and a jump away from complacency, neglect or even the condescending disdain that will reveal just how fragile that customer relationship was.

Love is unselfish, patient, slow to take offense and overlooks shortcomings. Love puts the interests of the object of its love ahead of its own. Those who truly, deeply love are almost unconditionally faithful to the object of their affection.

Customers, on the other hand, are self-centered. **They are in the relationship for what they are getting out of it.** (And why shouldn’t they be?) They are likely to take offense and notice shortcomings. If their interests change, or dissatisfaction occurs, they will quickly go elsewhere. And they are fickle. Most are more than open to the possibility of being wooed by another offer and many welcome any opportunity to experience something new.

**Your customers are sitting at the bar,
made up, looking hot—just waiting
for someone else to buy them a drink.**



Elizabeth Kraus

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phone: 206-841-2191

website: www.12monthsofmarketing.com

That's where the 2012 Small Business Marketing Calendar

"Little White Marketing Lies" comes in:

Have you ever watched NBC's "The Biggest Loser?" One of the most coveted prizes each season is the meal plan. Why? The meal plan does the work for the individual—they receive pre-portioned helpings, the calories are already counted, each meal is delivered right to the front door every day and it's all part of a strategic plan to help the contestant.

This calendar is the small business owner's "marketing meal plan."

Everything is laid out, month after month, week after week and day after day—build a strong, strategic marketing program that will give any small business owner or independent professional the means to truly:

- Develop a truly exceptional-extraordinary-and-excellent customer experience
- Deliver over-the-top (and beyond the expected) customer service
- Identify what truly separates them from the competition and communicate their unique strengths to clients
- Develop a highly engaged, motivated and loyal employee culture
- Go beyond 'accidental marketing' to effective, easy-to-manage and enjoyable strategic marketing
- Change the mindset of employees who are intimidated by or resistant to selling retail
- Learn how to make selling retail a strong part of the client experience (and one that is profitable to your business!)
- Find out how to cultivate genuine "customer love" and loyalty



Lie #4 Little White Marketing Lie #4: Our Customers Love Us

This one is especially dangerous: if you begin to believe your customers need, want and love your business more than your business needs, wants and shows that they love your customers, you're in trouble. You're right on the verge of complacency, neglect or even the condescending disdain that will reveal just how fragile the customer relationship was. By nearly every measure, you can't support the claim that your customers love you.

To understand why you have to know what characterizes the lover.

Love is essential and patient. It is able to take offense and overlook shortcomings. Love puts the interests of the object of its love ahead of its own interests. Those who love are almost extraordinarily faithful to the object of their affection.

If it describes your customers, I want to know where you live and I want to know how I can get me some!

The truth is, customers are self-centered. They are in the relationship for what they are getting out of it, and why shouldn't they be? They are likely to take offense and notice shortcomings. If their interests change, they will go elsewhere. They are fickle—most are completely open to the possibility of being wooed by another offer and many welcome opportunities to experience something new. (Just ask the good people over in the offices of MySpace.)

It's as if they're sitting the proverbial box, made-up and looking just waiting for someone to buy them a drink. There is a way to get customer love, but it's going to cost you. Why? Your customers are never going to get more into the relationship than you do.

Imagine a still pool of water providing a reflection. The reflection on the water may be a fair image of the original, but the original is still by far the stronger. Your business by your customer is a direct reflection of your dedication, engagement with, and interest in, them. The love you show for the customer is the original, their response is the reflection. Just as with the clear pool of water, the reflection is never going to be stronger than the original.

Cultivate genuine customer affection and the rest will follow. www.12monthsofmarketing.net/lwml4.html.

Customer Loyalty and Appreciation Month. Get 15-day sales to strengthen customer relationships at www.12monthsofmarketing.net/45daysales.html.

April 17 - Laugh at Work Week

- It's time to have some fun! Post random quotes, witty facts, dumb jokes, links to short comedy videos and off-the-wall observations on Facebook, Twitter, your blog, customer e-mail newsletter and employee newsletter or bulletin board.
- Write a humorous version of your customer or employee newsletter. Make humorous announcements during the day to give customers a chuckle. Create your own humorous podcasts for employee training or to advertise your business on social media sites, YouTube, your e-mail newsletter and website.
- Hold a best funny story (penk or joke contest), a dumb joke contest or have a stand-up comedy talent show.
- Hold a contest to find out which of your customers or employees has the best laugh.
- Hold a Facebook or Twitter new fan acquisition contest and reward a winner with a comedy video, humorous book, or a funny branded hat, t-shirt, mug or other trinkets.
- Purchase items with humorous sayings to add to retail such as mugs, t-shirts, bank notes, books, nail files, etc. Or you can even create your own branded line of humorous items.

April 18 - Siblings Day

- Hold an in-store event or online contest to find the siblings who most look, act, or sound alike. Other categories you might include are most alike in education or profession, funniest, closest in age (with or without being twins) or furthest apart in age.
- Solicit heartwarming (or hilarious) sibling stories online and in-store. Turn your blog, Facebook page and e-mail newsletter into a forum for people to post loving and appreciative sentiments to their siblings.

April 16 - Income Tax Pay Day

- Go to your local post office on the evening of April 15th and pick up the 10th bill on a Sunday in 2012 and give out bounce-back offers, samples, refreshments and/or branded t-shirts to those waiting in line to mail their tax returns at the last of dates or online, exercise for other community events, city parades, people waiting in line in front of dates or online, etc.
- Hold an income tax relief happy hour, your customers need it! Give clients a rebate with the purchase of specific items or pay the sales tax for customers one day one week, every Tuesday (etc) this month.

April 20 - Wear Your Pajamas Day

- Wear your pajamas today—why not? As a public relations stunt, work in pajamas to raise awareness and solicit donations for a local charity or needy family.
- Hold a "wear your pajamas day" happy hour or open house to invite customers to shop in their pajamas all day (long or a specific event).
- Hold a pajama or pajama fashion show. Open up after hours and invite your most loyal, influential and/or valuable customers to enjoy a midnight movie, dining, shopping event or fashion show. Partner with other businesses to hold a larger event, invite attendees to wear pajamas to the event, or to bring a pair of new pajamas in lieu of a cover charge which will be donated to a local shelter.
- Create your own funny, beautiful or otherwise one-of-a-kind sleepwear to add to your retail give away as a gift-with-purchase or contest prize.

April 16 - Tell a Story Day

When was the last time you told the story of your business to customers—or even to your employees, for that matter? Do they know why you're passionate about your business, your industry and/or? This month:

- Tell the story of your business in Facebook and blog posts and on your e-mail newsletter. Create or update the "about us" section of your website.
- Post interesting facts about your story at the point of purchase or on tag shelves.
- Create an annual report to be sent to your customers, employees, vendors, investors, community leaders and other stakeholders that describe how you are fulfilling your mission, pursuing your vision and the good that your business is doing.
- Ensure that employee hiring and training includes telling and living the story of your company, especially as relates to employee expectations, standards, values, promises to the customer, etc.
- Include independent contractors who impact the customer experience or who interact directly with customers in mandatory orientation and training.
- Send a corporate brochure or press kit to local media and to offices of local employees, school districts, city government or other influential organizations.
- Plan a corporate anniversary celebration or all-employee annual meeting.

April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Customer Loyalty and Appreciation Month April Fool's Day	Laugh at Work Week April 1-7	Send April e-mail newsletter news and offers				
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Easter			Siblings Day			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Income Tax Pay Day		Look ahead! Finalize May details and plan June and July			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	Begin promoting bridal, graduation and summer seasonal offers	Send e-mail: April Last Chance! and May June preview				
29	30					
	Take/break down expired promotions, discounts and merchandise for May	If we don't take care of our customers, someone else will. (Anonymous)				

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Elizabeth Kraus

Be InPulse branding • marketing & design

email: elizabeth@beinpulse.com

phone: 206-841-2191

website: www.12monthsofmarketing.com

With how-to, ideas and even content for:

- social media
- events and contests
- e-mail and web marketing
- service and product launches and promotions
- retail and service sales

Announcing the release of the 2012 Small Business Marketing Calendar



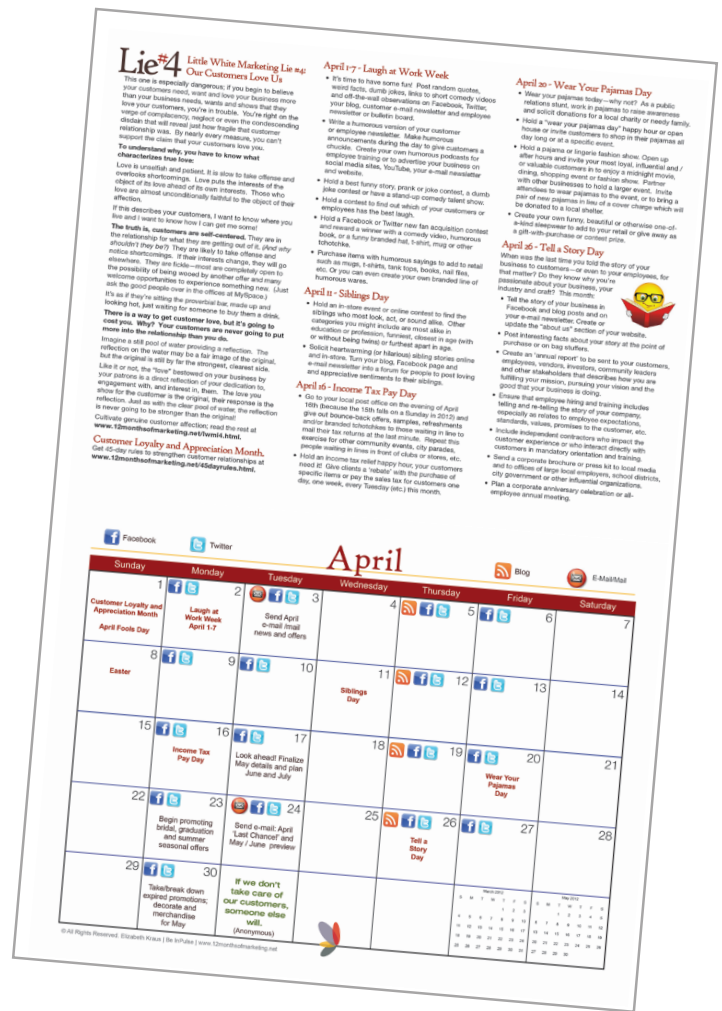
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Available for individual purchase on amazon and www.12monthsofmarketing.net

- Ideas, how-to, content and even a built-in schedule —build year-round marketing momentum:
 - attract, engage and retain clients
 - get more referrals
 - sell more retail
 - get more employee buy-in and loyalty
- A great tool for manufacturer and distributor sales consultants to help launch new products and sell through retail
- Includes links to free templates and worksheets as well as more online resources
- A great gift for small business owners, independent professionals and aspiring entrepreneurial students and graduates, **or**,
- A great addition to distributor and supply stores to resell or gift to your most important clients

Distributors, Resellers and Educators:

- Purchase in quantities at low bulk rates from 100 to 10,000 — a small investment that could result in thousands in retail sales and new clients for your clients in 2012!
- \$16.95 retail price makes it a valuable gift to your customers or profitable for resale. This publication can even be branded to your business, reinforcing your role as the client resource!
- Digital sample available for qualified resellers. Email request for information to elizabeth@beinpulse.com.



by **Elizabeth Kraus**, owner of Be InPulse branding, marketing and design, author of 365 Days of Marketing, Make Over Your Marketing, the 2011 Salon and Spa Calendar and 12 Months of Marketing for Salon and Spa.

Elizabeth Kraus
Be InPulse branding • marketing & design

email:
elizabeth@beinpulse.com

website:
www.12monthsofmarketing.com

blogs:
www.savvystylist.net and
365daysofmarketingblog.blogspot.com

