
GROWING YOUR BUSINESS IN THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

by **Dustin Vaughn Warncke**

Over the years with my company, Warncke Enterprises, I have helped launch many start-up outdoor companies into the outdoor industry and consulted with many who needed help growing their businesses with sales and marketing support. I also combine my resources with different marketing and advertising companies which work exclusively in the outdoor industry.

I have consulted with hunting ranches, fishing and hunting guides, resorts and lodges and well as many product companies. I have learned some of the things that have caused businesses to rise and fall over the years so I thought I would dedicate a blog post to the subject as I know it can be helpful for those entering the marketplace for the first time or those looking to grow their business in the future in this ever changing world.

Be the Best You Can Be

First of all, it must be said that businesses that start in any type of venture in the outdoor industry are going to have to be among the best and brightest. The outdoor industry is a very competitive place and lower quality products and services get weeded out every day. You have to be on your “A game” if you want to make your business succeed in this realm. After all, we live in what I call the “Golden Age” products and services available to us in this industry. Only the best will survive in the long run. It is imperative that you start with the best product or service you can offer before you even begin marketing and selling it.

Make Your Business Memorable

As strange as it sounds, some of the companies I have done work for in the gun accessories realm, for instance, don't even have their name printed or engraved on their products! Branding is simply the process involved in creating a unique impression in the consumer's mind about your business. Your goal should be to attract and retain loyal customers who will buy from you or use your services again and again. How will people ever know to where to buy from you again if you don't brand your business to make it memorable for them? Branding is vitally important to any business and a cornerstone of smart business development.

Have a Well Defined Marketing Budget

This seems like the most simple of advice that should almost go without saying but I run into start-up companies all the time who have dedicated all of their capital to the development and manufacturing of their product or service and have no funds left to promote and market their brand. Sales and marketing of your product or service have to be a paramount part of your business if you want to grow and sustain. I constantly run into companies needing sales and marketing advice who have spent all their time on producing a good product or providing a great

service to the consumer. If you can't sell it or market what you have to new consumers, you won't be in business for long.

Have a Good Website Optimized to Sell

It boggles my mind how many start-up businesses I work with that don't even consider having a website for selling their product or service. Some business owners I consult with have even told me they expect all of their sales to come from return customers or referrals.

Although these are important factors, having a presence online with which people learn more about you and from you is crucial. Regardless of what you are selling, you need a professional website. It doesn't have to be fancy or flashy but it needs to look good. One of the product companies I recently helped launched approached me about doing video on their product but had no budget to promote with and expected people to call or email him for purchase details of his rifle mount product. I told him I wouldn't do a video unless he had a website. I even offered to build it for him and did so. That same company now makes dozens of sales a month simply from people shopping online in the US and internationally. A great deal of his customer base live in England and Australia and would have never found him without a good website that has good SEO (search engine optimization). This business has prospered and has even allowed the owner to retire from his day job and run his outdoor business full time. The internet opens us up to global commerce. Take advantage of it when and where you can.

Maximize Social Media Influence

In our current culture, you can't talk about marketing your business unless you factor in social media exposure. There are so many people active in social media but so many business owners never even consider getting in line to maximize their business opportunities in this realm. Worse than that though, many people new to the world of social media simply join in and start selling away, which is a huge turn off to most of the people who use social media on a regular basis.

If you haven't done so already, join groups on LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook. Also, you will want to join Twitter and Instagram if you don't have an account yet. Start following and friending those in your niche and figure out what they are interested in and ways you can help them. What problems do they have that you can help them solve? What makes them tick? Link to all of your social media on your website and welcome your website visitors to connect with you during their visit. Then stay active in your pursuit to grow your sphere of influence. I have networked with some incredible people and made some great relationships in social media and it is not hard to do.

Develop a relationship with the community you are in. Focus on becoming an authority on your product line or service within the outdoor industry. No one likes to be sold to but people love to buy and that is how your approach has to come off for people to take a genuine interest in you and your product or service.

Seek to Provide Value First and Sell Second

One valuable piece of advice in this world of social media and elsewhere is to provide value first before you sell. As we talked about in the last section, it is so important to use social media and your website to build an audience but it is also important to first provide value to them. I am blown away by the number of both large and small companies I see selling their brand all over the internet without giving an ounce of value before asking for the sale. Consider making videos, writing articles, recording podcasts, or offering any other forms of digital content on your website at no cost to the consumer. Remember, people like free stuff and are likely to engage with you if you offer something for them to consume at no cost first. You want to build a relationship with your customer base first, then sell.

People won't buy from people or companies they don't trust so you have to build that trust and relationship with your future consumer before you ever make a sale. A good example of this kind of value based marketing is a hunting product company

I have done consulting for ever since they launched into the marketplace. The company utilizes written articles on hog hunting, bowfishing, blood tracking wounded game, and other valuable content related to their product on the main page of their website before the consumer ever gets to the sales page. They provide value first and have the sales results to prove that this approach works. Many of the businesses I have worked with have told me that they can't come up with their own original content.

This is not a problem in today's world. You can find a writer, podcaster, videographer, or someone else who can help you provide that content in return for getting their work promoted or in trade for a product or service you offer. Network and look for symbiotic relationships that benefit you both.

Build Your Own Herd

One of the things I learned about from working with Global Outfitters (www.globaloutfitters.com), an outdoor industry marketing company, is how important it is to build your own following and "herd" of consumers who follow you and purchase from you again and again. Building your own herd can mean different things. For one it could mean having an opt-in form on your website to capture email address so you can market to these consumers in the future. You can do this free to start out with using a company like Mail Chip, for example. Add current customers to this list. If you don't want to write a newsletter to talk about your products or services, hire a writer to help you. I personally do newsletters for a few of my clients and they are glad to be able to outsource that part of the business to me. A mailing list is important because it is a good way to stay in front of your past customers and potential customers when you have a new development in your business or new product to market. Many businesses I work with have solely depended on social media marketing. What if that was to go away one day? How would you communicate with people? A newsletter is a perfect way to do this.

These are just a few ideas to help you market and grow your business. If you are looking to implement some new sales and marketing strategies into your outdoor industry company,

connect with me through my website at www.dustinsprojects.com or through e-mail at dustin@dustin-warncke-tv.com. I am connected with a network of companies which specialize in marketing exclusively in the outdoor industry. Thank you as always for reading my blog!