



# Boston-Area Coach Shares Insights on Networking

By **Bill Doerr**, Sales & Marketing Editor

*Joe Costantino is a Boston-based marketing coach who helps small business owners build revenues using a systematic approach to marketing he's refined over 27 years of business. In this interview, he shares his personal philosophy about business in general and networking in particular.*

Above all else, Joe Costantino's a coach—and proud of it. Whether he's coaching basketball or baseball for youth in his hometown of Abington, Mass., or helping business owners reach the proverbial "next level," nothing gets Joe's juices running more than helping people reach their goals and dreams faster and more easily than they might without his help.

Joe's also an accomplished business owner in his own right. He started his first business at age 28, earned his MBA with a concentration in marketing, and has been in sales and marketing for the last 27 years. Four years ago he founded Business Marketing Success in the Boston area, and in 2005 he was named one of the first ten Authorized Duct Tape Marketing Coaches by John Jantsch, founder of Duct Tape Marketing in Kansas City, Mo..

I recently had the opportunity to meet and talk with Joe. Here are the highlights of our conversation.

## **Joe, tell me a little bit about your coaching business.**

Well, I work with clients that range from brand new startups to established firms generating up to about \$5 million annually. Typically, owners become aware of the need for my services when their business isn't growing as quickly or substantially as they'd like it to, their prospects expect them to compete on price rather than value, or they find that simply acquiring and keeping valued customers is becoming increasingly difficult.

Of course, these are just the symptoms of a more fundamental issue that is not being addressed by the business owner.

## **And that would be . . . ?**

Unfortunately, many small business owners don't have or use a marketing system. As a result, they fall in love with the latest marketing idea-of-the-week and fail to do

any one thing long enough or well enough to generate some decent results and revenues. Then, sooner or later, they'll start experiencing those symptoms I just referenced. Sadly—and this is especially true in a newer or start-up business—they may not have enough time or money left to correct their earlier mistake.

That's why the best thing I can do for any owner is to make sure he or she has and uses an approach to marketing that's every bit as systematic as the processes they use for their accounting, production, and hiring.

### **Good advice. Anything else?**

I wish more owners would realize that once they adopt a marketing system, even a few small, focused actions can produce significant improvements in such metrics as gross revenues, new accounts established, existing accounts retained, incremental sales—up-selling and cross-selling—to existing accounts, and the like.

### **So what do you tell a client who wants to grow revenues significantly in one to three years?**

- First, get a marketing system in place to stop the marketing-event-of-the-moment mentality.
- Target a specific market with laser-like precision. After all, trying to be all things to everyone means you won't be special to anyone.
- Develop a core message and use it to reach out to your target market members in a way that resonates with their concerns.
- Keep it simple. Don't try to do too much. Rome wasn't built in a day—same for your marketing. It's better to select and master a few appropriate marketing strategies for your business and then implement them in a massive manner. Once you do that effectively, then you can progressively do more.
- Finally, create "bullet-proof" relationships with your existing customers. They offer you the easiest path to increased revenues but they're always at risk of being poached by your competitors. Treat your prospects like customers so they know how good that can be: don't make them wonder! And treat your customers like prospects: don't take them for granted. Work harder to keep their business.

### **Let's talk about networking.**

Most of my clients are operating in highly competitive, overcrowded markets, so networking often creates the critical "edge" they need to break through the clutter in the marketplace. But just as with marketing, small business owners often have no formal system for networking with others and generating referrals once they do.

Networking is a key to your success in business and in life. If you embrace the truth that, all things being equal, people prefer to do business with someone they know, like, and trust, then failing to leverage the influence and goodwill of someone who

has already earned those qualities and is willing to help you bring in a prospect and enjoy a competitive edge is kind of like paying for your groceries but leaving them at the store. Why do that with the goodwill you've earned in your business and personal relationships?

**You say that most small business owners don't network effectively. Why?**

Good question. It kills me. But after a number of years and lots of clients, I've concluded that despite a sincere desire to network, a lot of people aren't doing it because they lack either a system to do it easily and effectively, the skills and ability to use an available networking system, or the motivation—did they win the lottery?

**So do you have a favorite way to network with others?**

Hey, come on. That's like asking me to tell you which kid should be put into a game and when. The only answer I can honestly give you is, "It depends."

**Fair enough. But you must have some favorite techniques.**

Of course. But remember: I don't want to get into the "technique-of-the-week" mentality with networking any more than I do with marketing. That said, I do find networking works best when you find another business—ideally, related to yours—whose owner can refer you to his or her clients and vice versa.

For example, let's take home remodeling. All kinds of contractors are in the same kind of homes that a remodeler wants to be in. They put in swimming pools, they do landscaping, they mow the lawn, they decorate the new family room, they service the furnace, they paint the interior, they fix the garage door. So any remodeler who isn't actively working with other contractors to exchange referrals with their respective clients is missing the boat—big time!

I find that about 90 percent of all businesses are in this situation. The other 10 percent need to rely on word-of-mouth advertising and networking with their existing clients to reach their goals.

**You're pretty convinced of the value of networking. Why?**

Much of my networking guidance for clients comes from a relationship I entered into late last year with John Jantsch. John's the founder of Duct Tape Marketing in Kansas City, Mo. He's one of the most popular and prolific marketing gurus on the planet.

I was one of the first ten Authorized Duct Tape Marketing Coaches that John appointed. He really "gets" the fact that marketing must be a system or it's not likely to be worth much to a business owner. John believes, as I do, that marketing must be simple, effective, and affordable. My marketing coaching services reflect John's

guidance and I rely heavily on the networking and referral strategies I've learned from John's Duct Tape Marketing organization.

I help my clients build a networking system using a Duct Tape marketing program called "Referral Flood." John wrote "Referral Flood" because far too many smaller firms and owners just weren't getting the quantity or the quality of referrals that they deserved. This program is an incredible resource and provides everything my clients need to build a networking system tailored for their business. Best of all, I know it's a system my clients can afford to use consistently and conscientiously over time.

While I can't go through everything I cover in that program, I can give you what I've come to call my "Ten Commandments for Networking Success."

- 1. Deserve to be networked. You have to be able to deliver the goods and make your customers "dee-lighted." If you can't do that, no one will want to network with you.
- 2. Communicate WHOM you want to reach by networking. It's not as easy as it seems. Amazingly, most small business owners can't do this.
- 3. Define, identify, and approach people who can network with you. Almost every business owner knows people who call on the same clients or customers they do but for a non-competitive reason. You must find these people and begin to work with them or you'll be working a lot harder than you like and a lot longer than you expect!
- 4. Have a plan to get your networking sources producing names for you. A key part of your plan must be to tell others whom it is you want to meet.
- 5. Craft a message that tells people who you are and what you do. That way, when you do reach a referral, they'll either qualify or disqualify themselves for you very, very quickly.
- 6. Use testimonials and case studies—not fluff copy. Whether you're educating a networking partner or a referral about your business, use client endorsements and case studies. Anything else is "fluff" and most people see through that easily.
- 7. Create something of value to offer a networking partner and contact. This allows a prospective client or contact to sample your approach to solving the kind of problems they probably have—and would love to get rid of. Informational reports on how to solve common problems that your target market members may be suffering from make you attractive to both your networking partners and their network contacts.
- 8. Commit your networking plan to writing. Writing makes it real.
- 9. Review your efforts regularly. Consistently ask yourself things like, "What's working? What's not? Which of my networking partners or sources are my most valuable? Most productive?" Never forget that improvement is a constant process and requires diligence on your part.
- 10. Support your networking partners. If you believe in someone, help him or her. meet people in your own network such as your clients, colleagues, and

CPA. Make it your job to help them reach their goals and realize the vision they have for their business. The goodwill you'll generate won't be taxed by the IRS, and the benefits to you—the growth of your network, your business, and your revenues—will happen quickly.

**Joe, is there anything else you'd like to add?**

That's the easiest question so far. I'd like to invite your National Networker readers to call me at (781) 878-1731 or email me at [joe@businessmarketingsuccess.com](mailto:joe@businessmarketingsuccess.com). I'll provide any owner with a complimentary, no-obligation, 30-minute marketing consultation to help them address any issue.

**Now *there's* a nice gift for the holidays!**

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