

# MARKETING MAGIC

For the workshops we sought out some of the region's leading experts. As was the format with last year's workshops, we split the sessions into three separate tracks, and each covered specific SME concerns, such as marketing, finance and crisis management. Ali Koaik, covers the key learnings from this session.

## Maximising the power of referrals

**N**etworking and social media are among some of the most effective marketing and sales techniques for SMEs. When done correctly and effectively, it could be more rewarding and a bang for the buck than direct marketing that may cost small businesses an arm and a leg.

This workshop at the SME Advisor Stars of Business Summit tried to generate more understanding around this topic through some of the best experts in the field.

Phil Bedford, who is known as the "The Rebel Networker", and the Managing Director of The Referral Institute Middle East, talked about our misperception and misunderstanding of the concept of networking for business: "The challenge with the most people networking is that they're not networking; they are actually cold calling face to face. The owners of a business would simply ask their staff to go to a networking event and put a target for them on the number of business cards they should come back with! Then he asks them to send them emails and try to sell them".

Unfortunately that's how we were all brought up to do our networking, our idea of networking is to scoop business cards and try to sell it to everybody in the room. It is right that we need to sell our business cards to as many people as possible, but we can make a world of difference just by changing our approach.

"The first thing we need to do when we try to network and meet people, is to try and

become visible, they need to know that we exist; they need to know roughly what we do and they need to believe that we do a good job. Once that has been accomplished, we start developing trust which develops credibility and builds a relationship which may lead to profitability" Phil explains.

"If we think about it, if we've just met someone and all he's trying to do is sell us



Phil Bedford – The Rebel Networker, Managing Director, The Referral Institute Middle East

**"If you try to help someone's business by referring him to someone instead of trying to close a single deal with him, you will develop a long term relationship where he or she will be willing to do the same for you."**

something, then we will start finding an excuse to get away from him, and that's what is called wrong networking."

Statistics show that if there are about a 100 people in a room, the chances of finding people who are interested in buying our product or service is no higher than 2%, this means, if we try to sell to every person we meet in the room,

there is a chance that you might actually annoy the small percentage of potential clients.

What we need to do is to start developing relationships by simply changing the dynamics of our networking approach. Phil explains "When you network with people and before you actually start trying selling something, try to ask them what they do, why they are there and then try to suggest how you can help them. And always keep asking yourself if you're actually selling too much, or if you're actually trying to help other people with their business while developing relationships?"

If you try to help someone's business by referring him to someone instead of trying to close a single deal with him, you will develop a long term relationship where he or she will be willing to do the same for you.

Using simple math, on average, each person knows about a 1000 people, so instead of attempting to sell my product to that one person, I am developing a long term relationship that will grant me access to the people he knows, and instead of selling him one product, I will have the opportunity to sell to at least 20 people if we assumed that only 2% would be interested to buy my product.

## Branding as part of the marketing magic mix

**M**any people wrongfully assume that the brand is defined by a sexy, cool or catchy logo that will attract customer's attention. However, a brand is not just a logo, colour or shape; it's not the beautiful packaging or the catchy TV ad. All of that is marketing. The brand is much

## SME ADVISOR STARS OF BUSINESS SUMMIT WORKSHOPS

more than that, as Mark Rogers, Founding Partner, mojo Group defines: "The brand is the reputation of your product or service that sits in the mind of your client or customer."

So what are the things SMEs need to look at when setting up a brand?

Mark explains: "When we look for a brand for a client, we deconstruct it and look into three things. The first thing we look at is



Mark Rogers, Founding Partner, mojo Group

**"The third thing we look at is the soul. It's the thing inside the brand that connects with the consumer and that is the hardest part to get right when you're marketing. It is usually very difficult to find and very difficult to define but at the same time a very important part of your brand."**

the art. When you want to sell your brand, whatever it is, they'll be an art in what you do and you have to figure out what that art is".

The second thing we look at is the business part of it so when we are talking to marketing people then the focus is on the marketing and when we are talking to commercial people we talk about the commercial aspects of the brand and how to drive profitability and so on".

"The third thing we look at is the soul. It's the thing inside the brand that connects with the consumer and that is the hardest part to get right when you're marketing. It is usually very difficult to find and very difficult to define but at the same time a very important part of your brand".

The brand is what defines your product in the customers' minds. As a customer, you will be able easily predicted what kind of product you should be expecting from a certain brand in

term of look, quality, service and functionality, and that is what branding is about.

And that is why it is absolutely critical to unify your business with your brand. And as a company, if you haven't unified your vision and if your brand voice is not consistent with it, then you will fail.

Mark explains: "Everybody within your business needs to know the story and they need to speak with a single voice, you need to agree who you are and what your value is to consumers, and to do that you need to do three things: One, you need to get the organisation behind you, two you need to simplify your message and you need to create a message with words or with picture or both so that everybody, from your employees to your customers, understands what your brand promise is. Three, you need to amplify the message, despite perhaps not having the budgets that larger companies possess, but which can be achieved to some extent with the help of social media.

### Social media done right

**C**reating a profile on any social media Website is not enough and besides trying to find people who would be interested in connecting with you, you need to be able to find people who are looking for your type of services or products.

Alan explained: "The main point is to drive people to your profile using keywords that will help them find you using the search engine, so try to repeat in your profile the words that will make your profile appear on the top of the search result – people simply won't be searching for your name and so you need to draw them closer to your product or service by an alternative means."

Additionally, you can rearrange the boxes within your LinkedIn profile by putting the important things on top, so if you are looking for a job, place your CV at the top but if you're providing a service put this description instead and so on.

You can add to the links anything that you would like to promote, such as word documents, some powerpoint slides or presentations, PDF files or images by simply

choosing the "get more applications" option from the top bar menu.

But when it comes to Twitter, it's all about being active and visible, and to do that, many people think it is very time consuming and many companies do consider hiring someone just to keep their Twitter account busy!

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Alan Devereux, Communications Officer, British Business Group

"Twitter does not need to be hard work; I was able to create over six thousand tweets since my Twitter account was created last October and that's about 50 tweets a day. There is no way I can be able to do that and have a full time job at the same time, so what I do is that I schedule and plan."

He explains: "There are many applications that you can use within Twitter to schedule your tweets. Some of them will highlight the times when your followers are highly active and schedule your tweets accordingly. So I prepare my tweets and schedule them for the week and the program will do the job of sending them during the times when my followers are highly active".

"You can also categorise your followers by lists to make sure you are tweeting the right message to the right people in the targeted country. However, this should be measured, and you can use other applications that will calculate the number of clicks on a particular tweet and therefore track down what works and what doesn't."