

The Step-by-Step System to Building Your Small Business

**Helping small business owners around the world build
successful, profitable and rewarding businesses**

Module 4 Create Your Marketing System

Lesson 4E Grassroots Marketing

**Solutions and
Direction for tomorrow's possibilities**

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Definition	5
Benefits.....	5
Build Your Referral Engine	5
Increase Your Visibility	5
Discover Hidden Opportunities	5
Receive Support and Encouragement	6
How to Do Grassroots Marketing	6
Step 1 Determine Your Objective	6
Step 2 Write Your Letter.....	7
Key Components of an Effective Letter	7
Types of Requests	9
How to Improve Your Results	10
Step 3 Whom to Send your Letter To	12
Step 4 Send and Follow Up	12
Send Your Letters in Batches	12
What to Say During Follow-Up Calls.....	13
Overcoming Fear	14
Assignment 1 Plan Your Grassroots Marketing Strategy.....	15
Assignment 2 Implementation Schedule and Checklist	16
FAQs.....	17

Introduction

Hello!

If you are like most people, you have an existing group of people who know you, respect you and like you—your grassroots network. When launching or growing a small business, you are missing a big opportunity if you don't leverage your existing network. Some business owners are hesitant to market to their friends and family. I think that's a shame because I guarantee there are people in your network who will literally bend over backwards to help you—if you just make it easy for them to do so!

In this lesson, you will:

- Learn to leverage your existing network as you grow your business.
- Learn to write an effective letter for grassroots marketing.
- Identify recipients for your grassroots marketing letter.
- Learn to follow up on your grassroots marketing letter.
- Understand ways to increase referrals from your network.
- Discover ways to add value and inform instead of sell.
- Learn how to use call to action to increase the number of people who contact you.
- Discover ways to overcome any fears you may have about leveraging your existing network.
- Learn how to discover hidden opportunities within your network.
- Understand how to stay in touch with your network without “being a pain”!

This lesson has been specifically designed to make it easy for you to implement this powerful marketing strategy. Remember, people WANT to help you. Allow them to do so by letting them know exactly how they can!

Best regards,

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Definition

When I talk about using grassroots marketing to grow your business, I am talking about leveraging your existing network.

Grassroots marketing can be done via mail, email, phone calls and/or in face-to-face meetings. In this lesson, I recommend that you send out a grassroots marketing letter and follow up with phone calls.

When engaging in grassroots marketing, your goal is to inform and add value. This is very different from trying to sell, which I bet you really don't want to do anyway!

Benefits

Build Your Referral Engine

Wouldn't it be great to have a referral-based business? This happens when enough people know about you and your services and send you clients. I discuss this further in "Lesson 4C: Strategic Alliances" and "Lesson 4H: Referrals."

For now, the main point to remember is: The more people who *clearly understand what you do, who your ideal clients are and the value you provide*, the more referrals you will generate. And remember, your existing network already knows, likes and respects you. Many of these people would be happy to support you.

Through your grassroots marketing strategies, you can show them how!

Increase Your Visibility

In general, the more people who know about your services, the more clients you will attract. Regardless of the size of your network, you will increase your visibility when you engage in grassroots marketing.

And there are strategies you can use to multiply your visibility through key contacts in your network. More on that below!

Discover Hidden Opportunities

When you connect with your existing network using the guidelines and suggestions provided, you can uncover lots of hidden opportunities! These opportunities can come in the form of speaking engagements, potential strategic alliance partnerships, introductions to key people in your target market and more.

Receive Support and Encouragement

When you inform your network about your new (or growing) business, you will inevitably receive words of support and encouragement. Because you are doing the thing that most people only daydream about, sharing your news allows people to congratulate you and wish you well.

As a general rule, when you work for yourself, you don't get a lot of praise and acknowledgement. Connecting with your network is one way to enjoy this psychological boost!

How to Do Grassroots Marketing

While there are many ways to leverage your existing network through grassroots marketing, I recommend you:

1. Send a grassroots marketing letter.
2. Follow up with a phone call.
3. Send periodic updates, either via snail mail or email.

Step 1 Determine Your Objective

As you sit down to work on your grassroots marketing, the best place to start is to determine your objective.

What do you want to accomplish by connecting with your existing network? Remember, these are people who know you, like you, respect you and WANT to help you. Of course you can ask for referrals, but that is just one of many things you might want to request.

Things you can accomplish through grassroots marketing:

- Inform your network about your business.
- Generate referrals from your network.
- Secure informational interviews with people in your target market.
- Set up meetings with people in your network.
- Have Comp Consults with people in your network, so they have a better understanding of your business and what it is that you do.
- Provide value to your network.
- Identify possible speaking opportunities.
- Identify possible strategic alliance opportunities.
- Subscribe people to your newsletter/ezine.

Step 2 Write Your Letter

Quite simply, a grassroots marketing letter is a letter about your business that you send to people who know you. When you are just starting, it often takes the form of an announcement letter. If you have been in business for a while and have already sent an initial announcement, you can use grassroots marketing to provide periodic updates on your business.

Key Components of an Effective Letter

First Paragraph/Introduction

Clearly and concisely explain why you are writing. You want to capture the readers' interest and encourage them to read on.

Example:

I am excited to announce the launch of my professional business! A while back, I learned about this emerging field and decided to explore it as a profession by enrolling in Coach University, the world's leading coach-training program. After two years of classes and coaching clients part-time, I left my full-time software sales job and am now pursuing my true passion—working with sole proprietors in the healing professions who want to significantly grow their businesses while still having a great life. This letter is to let you know what I'm up to and to ask for your help and support!

Body of Letter

After your introductory paragraph, I recommend you write a little about your industry in general and then write specifically about whom you work with and what you work with them on. The goal is to provide enough information, so they get what you do and how they can help you without overwhelming them. Here are some examples:

1. Information on your industry/establish the credibility of your profession

Since many people aren't familiar with coaching, in this example the coach provided a brief explanation of coaching. Adding a quote from a respected news source is just one way to increase credibility.

Example:

As you may have read in the *New York Times*, *Fortune*, *Time* or *Fast Company*, coaching is quickly becoming one of the leading tools that successful people use to really be their best. I have enclosed some further information on the nature of coaching. And I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this emerging industry.

2. Details on your business

When describing your business, be specific about WHO you serve and WHAT it is that you do for your clients. You need to paint a very clear picture, so people understand who would be a good referral. Focus on the problems solved and the benefits your business delivers! Also it is good to include a little about your HOW (see Lessons 2A and 2B).

Example:

As an experienced and trained professional coach, I work as a partner with my clients and use a 5-Step System for Success. This process weaves in the principles, structures and technology that enable my clients to attract more business and increase their profitability while still having time to live a rewarding and fulfilling life.

I am currently working with a number of clients across the country (we meet by phone), and my goal is to have a full practice of 20 clients. I have found the best way to reach new clients is by word of mouth, so I am asking my current network of friends, family and colleagues, like you, for referrals.

Although I coach a variety of practitioners, my specialty is working with people in the healing professions, such as psychotherapists, chiropractors, acupuncturists and massage therapists. Specifically, I help my clients:

- Generate more business.
- Improve their profitability.
- While still maintaining a balanced and fulfilling life.

My ideal clients are talented professionals who understand the benefit and value of having support as they grow their business.

Closing/Make a Specific Request

Think about the objectives you identified. Then make a specific request for referrals, leads on speaking engagements, etc. The key is to ASK. Otherwise, you won't receive!

Example #1:

I provide a complimentary 45-minute introductory coaching consultation to people who want to learn more about how coaching can help them grow their businesses and their lives! I have included several business cards that have the special Complimentary Consultation offer printed on the back. Would you please share these with the psychotherapists, chiropractors, acupuncturists and massage therapists you know?

Thank you in advance for your help and support, and please let me know if there is any way I can be of service to you!

Example #2:

So, there are two things I'd like to ask you:

1. Would you please keep me in mind when you encounter any self-employed professionals who are looking to grow their business while still having time to live their lives? I really love working with this group of people and have a variety of free resources available on my website.
2. Do you know any attorneys or accountants who specialize in serving self-employed professionals? I'm looking to conduct informational interviews with people who serve the same target market as I do and explore the possibility of forming alliances. I would really appreciate any introductions you could make on my behalf!

Thanks so much for your time! I will give you a call next week to see if you have any questions or ideas. Plus, I'd really like to hear what you've been up to lately!

Types of Requests

In your grassroots marketing letter, you want to be sure to make a specific request or requests. Below are additional ideas on the kinds of things you can ask your network.

Referrals—"Keep me in mind"

As in the example above, you want to paint a clear picture of whom you serve and what you do. You then ask your network to keep you in mind or pass along your contact information to anyone they know who might benefit from your service.

Referrals—Request an Introduction

This is more direct than the approach above. In this case, you specifically ask for referrals and let the reader know you will be following up with a phone call.

Example:

Do you know anyone who is currently contemplating a career change and might benefit from working with a career coach? If so, would you consider making an introduction on my behalf? I'd very much appreciate it and will follow up with you via phone to discuss!

Speaking Opportunities

Perhaps you are using speaking as a way to grow your business. Use your grassroots marketing letter to find speaking engagements. Specifically ask if the letter readers

belong to or know of any organizations that seek speakers. Be sure to provide an overview of the types of talks you can do, which of course, should be congruent with your *Who* and *What*!

Example:

In addition, I am looking for speaking opportunities as a way to increase my visibility. Do you belong to any organizations or know of any groups who regularly seek speakers, for example, business organizations, brownbag lunch talks, etc.? Some of the topics I speak on are:

- Time Management for Busy Professionals
- 3 Simple Steps for Getting and Staying Organized
- How to Have More Fun at Work

The Informational Interview Approach

As you may know, the informational interview is an effective job search tool. It can also be used when growing your business. Instead of asking for referrals of people who might want your services, ask to be connected with people in your target market, so you can get their feedback (i.e., on a new service or product you are offering).

This approach is a great way to increase the number of contacts you receive because you are not selling, you are just gathering information. Oftentimes, an informational meeting can lead to a Comp Consult or other referrals. Just remember to focus on getting feedback, not selling, when you conduct the informational interview!

Example:

I am interested in interviewing recently promoted managers about the challenges that are inherent in this type of career transition. Do you know anyone who fits this profile whom I might be able to speak with?

How to Improve Your Results

Personalize

It is worth the time and energy to learn how to use the mail merge program in your word processing application. Most word processors (such as Microsoft Word) have the ability to create customized direct mail letters by taking the name and address from a database, Excel spreadsheet, or palm pilot software. This will create a good impression and show that you are serious and professional.

I also recommend personally signing each letter and writing a short personal greeting on the bottom next to your signature.

Professionalism

You don't need pre-printed letterhead to create a professional-looking letter. If you have it, great, but it is definitely not a requirement. Instead, buy high-quality paper (www.paperdirect.com, Kelly Paper Stores, office supply stores) and matching envelopes. You can "create" your own letterhead as part of the letter by simply customizing the header and footer.

Hint: If you don't want to print the mailing addresses on each envelope, use clear labels and place those on the envelopes. Personally addressing each envelope with good penmanship is another great option.

Provide Value

Throughout this business-building system, you have read about the importance of focusing on providing value when you do your marketing. This goes for grassroots marketing as well! Here are suggestions of things to include with your letter that provide value:

- A copy of an article you have written
- A top ten list
- An assessment, checklist or other tool
- Resource recommendations (books, websites, etc.)
- An invitation to participate in a free teleclass or attend a free talk that you are offering

Things to Include

Be creative! Besides the things mentioned above, what else might you want to include in your mailing? Here are some ideas:

- Business cards (I recommend sending a couple, so they can share them!)
- A brochure, if you have one
- An article about your service
- A "one-pager" on your industry or service. Using the FAQ (frequently asked questions) format is particularly effective because it is easy to read/scan. On the back, put your client testimonials or success stories.
- Gift certificates for a Complimentary Consultation or for a special offer on your service

Call to Action/Special Offers

You might want to create a call to action or mention a special offer in your letter. You can offer 50% off on the first month of services. You can offer a special rate.

Use limited-time offers for best results and so people will feel compelled to act quickly! If you are about to raise your fees, you can announce this and offer your service at your existing rate if they act within a certain period of time. You can include a special bonus, such as a free assessment or enrollment in a lesson you offer, if they act by a certain date.

Step 3 Whom to Send your Letter To

Basically, you want to send your letter to anyone and everyone! Below are some ideas:

- Your friends and family
- Your Christmas/holiday card list
- Former coworkers and professional contacts
- People who provide you services (such as your dentist, hairstylist, doctor, attorney, accountant, veterinarian, mechanic, etc.)
- Former classmates from high school, college, grad school, etc.
- People in your church, clubs, etc.

Please note that I am NOT recommending you get a database of all the people in your church, for example, and mail to everyone on that list. Grassroots marketing is about leveraging your existing network—people you know and people who know you!

Step 4 Send and Follow Up

When you make the effort to follow up your grassroots marketing letter with a phone call, you greatly increase the effectiveness of your campaign—by anywhere from 100% to 400%. Let's face it, people are busy. Very often, when people get your letter, they will be excited for you and think that they'd like to help and support you. But then the letter goes in their in-box, and the memory of it fades into the background.

If you make follow-up phone calls, you provide another “touch” and have an opportunity to make a specific request and receive their help and support right then and there, while you are on the phone.

Send Your Letters in Batches

I strongly recommend that you make follow-up phone calls to everyone to whom you send your grassroots marketing letter. Send out your letter in batches, so you have time to make your follow-up calls.

For example, send an initial batch of ten letters. The next week send out another ten letters and make follow-up calls to the first 10 letters you sent out.

Keep up this pattern until you have sent out all of your letters and made all of your follow-up calls.

What to Say During Follow-Up Calls

What you say will depend on your relationship with the person you are calling, what you wrote in your letter and your own personal style.

Most of the time, people will comment right away on your letter and steer the conversation in that direction.

One of the keys when making follow-up phone calls is to make a specific request. Know what you want before you call!

Below are some sample scripts. Feel free to use these or customize them as you desire.

Sample Phone Script #1—"Thinking of You" Approach:

Hi, Mary, this is Sally Smith. Am I catching you at a good time?

Great! I've been meaning to touch base with you for ages, and now that I've left my job, I have more time in my schedule. How are you?

Focus the conversation on them for awhile. Chances are the focus will shift to you or they will comment that they received your letter. If not...

Things are great with me. I am very excited about my business; and if possible, I would love your help and support in my new endeavor.

As I described in my announcement letter, I specialize in coaching people who are going through career transitions. I'd really appreciate it if you would pass along my name to anyone you know who is dissatisfied with their current job and is thinking of making a change.

By any chance do you know anyone who is currently in that situation? If so, I'd love to schedule a Complimentary Consultation with them. Of course, if they wanted to work with me as their coach, that would be great; but there is certainly no obligation. I love being able to support people in career transition, even if it is just with one free call.

Sample Phone Script #2—Comp Consult Invitation:

Hi, Mary, this is Sally Smith. Am I catching you at a good time?

Great! I'm calling to follow-up on the recent letter I sent about my new business.

I would love for you to have a sample coaching consultation with me. You would then have a better understanding of what coaching is and who might benefit from working with me.

Do you have time in the next two weeks to schedule a call?

Overcoming Fear

I know that many people have apprehension about making follow-up phone calls. Below are some strategies to help you overcome fear and make your calls as effective as possible:

Schedule Time

Set aside time in your calendar to make the phone calls. If you wait until you “feel” like it, there is a high likelihood you simply won’t do it!

Get Centered

Take several deep breaths, and get centered before making your calls. Remind yourself that you aren’t selling; you are simply calling to connect and to ask for assistance. Most people appreciate being asked for their support and help. Remind yourself of this, and “turn off” any self-talk that claims otherwise!

Use a Script

Have a phone script “cheat sheet.” Use the above sample scripts, or create your own. List the key points on a note card, and keep that in front of you when you make your calls!

Lighten Up!

Have fun, and take the pressure off of yourself. Then simply smile and dial!

Assignment 1 Plan Your Grassroots Marketing Strategy

By now, you can see the benefits of leveraging your existing network through grassroots marketing. Use this page to plan out your next steps, and then get to work!

My objectives or goals for sending out a grassroots marketing letter:

Reasons I am excited about this:

Groups of people who I can send my letter to:

Concerns or challenges I have about grassroots marketing:

My strategies to overcome any concerns or challenges:

Assignment 2 Implementation Schedule and Checklist

Use this chart to create a timeline for implementing your grassroots marketing campaign. In the TARGET DATE column, indicate when you want to do each task. Use the ACTUAL DATE column to indicate when you actually complete it, and then “check it off!”

Ask your coach to give feedback on your letter and to hold you accountable!

TASK	TARGET DATE	ACTUAL DATE	√
Write 1st draft of letter			
Get feedback on letter			
Finalize letter			
Assemble mailing list/database			
Buy paper, envelopes			
Buy stamps			
Print and personalize Batch #1			
Send out Batch #1			
Make follow-up calls to Batch #1			
Print and personalize Batch #2			
Send out Batch #2			
Make follow-up calls to Batch #2			

FAQs

Q: Do I have to send a printed letter, or can I send a grassroots email?

A: I recommend you send a printed grassroots marketing letter. People are so bombarded with email that an announcement received in the mail makes a much bigger impression. By mailing the letter, you can also include things such as business cards, coupons, etc. If you only have email addresses for some of your contacts, you can either email them and ask for their mailing address or, if they prefer not to give out that info, create an email version of your letter specifically for that group of people.

Q: I already sent out an announcement letter when I first launched my business last year. What should I send now?

A: You can safely contact people every 6 months without worrying that you are bombarding them. In fact, I recommend that you connect with your existing network approximately every 6 months! After your initial announcement letter, I recommend sending regular updates on your business. Announce any newly defined target market and niche since the last letter. Include a client success story. Send a free report that you have written. Be creative!

Q: What can I do to maximize the number of referrals I receive from my grassroots marketing campaign?

A: You can do a number of things to increase your referrals:

- Be specific about whom you serve and what it is that you do. You need to paint a very clear picture in order for people to “get” what you do and who are candidates for referrals. If you are vague or position yourself as all things to all people, your network won’t know whom to refer to you.
- Specifically invite people in your network to engage in a Comp Consult with you for the explicit purpose of better understanding your service, so they can refer people to you. In general, people who have experienced your business service through a Comp Consult are a better referral source than those who have not.
- Follow up your grassroots marketing letter with phone calls. Specifically ask for referrals as described earlier.