

## Eight Steps to create an Infectious Business

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When customers evangelize you to colleagues and friends, what they say is as important as the passion behind it. To make it easy for customers to describe what you do, they must easily understand the “idea” of your company. If people quickly grasp the idea and benefits of your business, it’s considered to be infectious.

It is, as author Seth Godin says, an “ideavirus.” Just like a biological virus, an ideavirus can spread very quickly from person to person. It’s also known as the “elevator pitch,” or what you would say to a stranger about your value proposition during the time it takes to ride in an elevator, roughly equal to the attention span of most prospective customers.

To create effective customer evangelists, your customers must know your elevator pitch as well as, if not better than, you. ABC Technology Services --not their real name – needed new clients. Company executives described themselves this way: “ABC delivers network and systems management solutions that assist companies in cost-effectively maximizing the performance and availability of their network infrastructures.”

It was an eye-glazing description. Here’s how tuning their pitch changed the game.

First, they interviewed 10 of their customers. They asked customers to describe what they valued most about ABC’s services and how they would describe ABC to a friend or colleague. Understanding what customers say -- in their own words-- is key to understanding how people spread the word.

Using the words of their customers, ABC reframed its pitch to focus on the pain felt by prospective customers. Since ABC’s primary source of leads was via word of mouth, the pitch had a casual tone.

From “network and systems management,” the elevator pitch said: “You know how when you are at work, and you are pulling your hair out because of computer problems? Your system is slow; you can’t send or receive email, or you have to reboot your computer a lot? Well, we fix those problems for businesses.”

Simple language and in a context that prospects identify with: pain. The ABC executives tried out the new pitch at a networking event. Profuse head nodding ensued. A failing computer system is a simple “ideavirus” to grasp, and it’s easy for someone to tell others, as was demonstrated several times at the event, at which ABC landed six leads.

The ideavirus spread quickly as one prospect after another sought out the ABC team leader after hearing about them from someone else. Today, ABC has more work than it can handle. How do you create an ideavirus for your business?

Follow these eight steps:

1. Interview or have a third party interview your current satisfied customers.
2. Ask customers to describe the situation and pain which first motivated them to buy your product/service.
3. Ask customers to describe the value of your products or services.
4. Ask customers how they describe your business to others.
5. Write down exactly--word for word--the answers to these questions.
6. Reframe your pitch using the pain points and description of how customers describe your services to others.
7. Test and refine your pitch at business networking events.
8. Use your refined pitch in your marketing materials.

A simple ideavirus is part of the contagion that helps create customer evangelists.

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