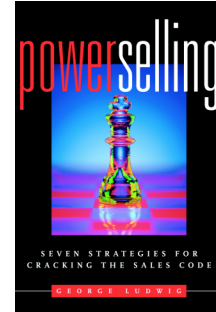


## For Immediate Release

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## **If You Build It, They Will Come: Why REPUTATION Really, Really Matters to Customers—and How to Create a Great One from the Ground Up**

*Today's troubled economy and frequent news stories about unethical corporations have made having a great reputation a huge selling point. George Ludwig tells you how to create a reputation that customers will reward with their loyalty.*

**Chicago, IL** (September 2008)—*Reputation* is the new profit center for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Think about it. Endless corporate scandals have made cynicism our “default” setting. Customers are just a Google search away from hundreds or even thousands of reviews on a company’s service. And we’re mired in a sluggish economy that has businesses and consumers cutting costs left and right. If you’re not a reputable corporation, your lifespan isn’t likely to be long. But no matter how many times you *say* you’re an honest, trustworthy, customer-centered company, the proof is in the proverbial pudding. Reputation is built one person and one customer interaction at a time—and that means everyone in your organization must stay focused on creating a winning reputation.

“Customers have never been more skeptical or suspicious than they are now,” says George Ludwig, author of *Power Selling: Seven Strategies for Cracking the Sales Code* (Kaplan Publishing, ISBN: 0-7931-8571-8, \$19.95). “They don’t have the time and certainly not the money to waste on a company that doesn’t have their best interests at heart. To overcome that skepticism, whether you’re a B2B or B2C company, you *must* have a reputation for being credible and trustworthy. And reputations don’t come about by chance, but by design.”

That's right. Maintaining a good reputation in an age when disgruntled customers can reach millions with nothing more strenuous than the click of a mouse means making a conscious company-wide effort. Everyone must get in on the act: customer service reps, middle managers, marketing specialists, and more—all must strive to be the very best at their jobs. Collectively, their individual reputations will add up to your corporate one.

Here are a few reputation builders that you should focus on at your company:

**Create clear company-wide reputation standards.** It's important to have clear guidelines for reputation building so that everyone in your organization is constantly reminded of the kind of reputation they should be building for the company. Ludwig suggests that you have new hires and current employees sign a "World-Class Reputation Credo Contract" that emphasizes trustworthiness—which, in turn, is built on a foundation of three personal principles: service-centricity, character, and competence.

"Make sure everybody knows exactly what the standards mean and that a huge emphasis will be placed on the standards during their time with your company," he says. "Post the standards around the office so that employees are constantly reminded of the kind of company reputation they have committed to building. When an employee excels at meeting the standards, publicize his or her good work. Reward the employee in some way so that everyone else will be inspired to reach the same achievement."

**Appoint a VP of Reputation for the company.** Put someone in charge of reputation and make a big splash about it. Hold a company-wide meeting (perhaps even a kick-off event) and announce the identity of your new VP. This person will define customer service benchmarks, define shared values, monitor employee adherence to values, and designate the "dealbreakers"—those values that can't be violated at any cost. For example, maybe for your company it's calling a customer back within two hours or requiring that employees attend two reputation management meetings each year.

How do you find such a person? Well, you could always hire someone new, but Ludwig says it's even better if you can pinpoint an effective and loyal "people person" who already works for you and bestow the title on him or her. In fact, you might consider polling employees to find out which of their coworkers is best suited for the job.

"Be careful and thoughtful when selecting your VP of Reputation," says Ludwig. "Take it very seriously. He or she will infuse your company and everyone in it with a commitment to building a great reputation. And if you have a VP of Reputation, your employees will know exactly where to go for advice whenever they have a problem on the reputation front."

**Hire the best people and keep them happy.** Greatness attracts greatness. When you are known for being the best, good people want to be associated with you. What's more, they want to stay with you. So it stands to reason that you need to kick-start the greatness cycle now by hiring only the absolute best talent in the business, paying them well, and

making sure they're engaged in and fulfilled by their work. (And yes, you might have to get rid of some dead wood—a painful but necessary part of the process.)

“When you have the most talented people working for you, you’ll know that your business is in safe hands,” says Ludwig. “They become your reputation protectors. You won’t have to spend as much time enumerating every reputation standard, because talented employees have been living them in their previous jobs and in their daily lives. If you have great talent working for you, it’s much easier to stay ahead of your competition. That success will attract more top performers, who will generate more success, which will attract still more top performers. It’s a self-perpetuating ‘good reputation’ cycle.”

**Ask for customer feedback.** Here’s a great way to take an honest assessment of your corporate identity and reputation: Ask anyone who will listen—customers, prospects, colleagues, friends, and family—about their experiences with your company. Make customer surveys and comment cards a staple of your customer service so that you are constantly getting feedback from your biggest critics. And once you’ve collected all of this feedback, act on it! Figure out how to solve the problems that you hear about and how to capitalize on those things at which your company excels.

“Remember, the feedback you receive doesn’t have to consist of only surveys and comment cards,” says Ludwig. “If a customer compliments you on a job well done, ask him or her for a testimonial. Once you’ve collected these positive testimonials, post them on your company website and in your marketing mailings. It’s a great way to spread the word about your great reputation.”

**Know who you are. Believe you can be better.** Take stock of what kind of company you’ve got right now. What motivates you and the other leaders in your company? What motivates your employees? In which areas do you excel...and in which ones do you fall short? These are the types of questions you and your employees need to consider in order to assess your company’s reputational strengths and weaknesses.

“No company has a 100 percent great reputation in every aspect of the business,” says Ludwig. “There’s always room for improvement. If you do some digging and self-assessment and realize your company is in worse shape than you thought, don’t worry. It’s never too early or too late to change. Just start making positive changes now so that you can ensure that your company has a bright future. Set goals for your company’s improvement and get your employees excited about building a great reputation.”

**Appearance really does count—so upgrade your image.** However firmly you believe the adage “You can’t judge a book by its cover,” you must realize that customers and potential customers *will*. If they see a messy office space and unprofessionally dressed employees, they’ll question what kind of work ethic your company really supports. In the same light, if they receive pristinely packaged products from your company and interact with professionally dressed employees who are always polite and respectful, they’ll feel you are more credible.

“Visual credibility plays a huge role in building a great reputation,” says Ludwig. “It will be much easier for your company to build and keep a great reputation if you and your employees dress professionally, if your office space is clean and well-kept, if your product packaging is unique and practical, and if you treat customers with respect during in-person meetings and on the phone. My point is this: In the same way people are told to dress for the job they want and not the one they have, your organization should ‘dress’ for the reputation it wants to build.”

**Become an industry headliner by specializing in a market niche.** In your company-wide self-assessment, you may find that the reason your business has a subpar reputation is because it is spread too thin. Concentrating your business in a single industry niche allows everyone within your company to maximize their expertise, credibility, and reputation. And it helps the company put out better products and provide better service. Consumers today have big challenges, and they want proven solutions from a company that understands the specific nuances of their problems. They don’t want generalists.

“How often is the best place in town for a great sandwich also the best place for pizza?” asks Ludwig. “The answer is not very. You usually go to one place if you want a great sandwich and a completely different place if you want great pizza. No one can be all things to all people, and that includes you. Find out what your company does best, which product or product line sells the best, or which service is requested the most, and make that area your company’s specialty.”

**When you must choose between character and cash, go with the former.** When you think about someone with good character, what traits come to mind? How about integrity, honesty, humility, and a commitment to helping others? These are all elements you and your employees should possess. What does having good character mean in terms of how you run your business? It means that neither you nor your employees ever lie to a customer, even if it means you risk losing their business. It means refusing to take on a client who has shady business practices or who has disrespected one of your employees. It means firing people who don’t live up to your ethical standards. Good character will keep your revenue high, your relationships with customers strong, and will provide you with a reputation for being a company that people can trust.

“Traits like honesty, integrity, a sense of fair play, and respect for others are vital for long-term success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century business world,” says Ludwig. “Just look at what happened to companies that didn’t place these traits on a pedestal. Do you really want your company to end up like Enron or WorldCom? Companies that eschew character for short-term financial gains will lose out in the long run.”

**Put your best reputation foot forward.** When you’ve developed a legitimately excellent reputation, don’t be afraid to spread the word. Develop marketing messages about your company that articulate its positive reputational traits. Use public relations campaigns, results-oriented marketing, and value-providing networking to convince potential customers who aren’t sure what your company is all about. Here are a few techniques you may want to consider:

✓ *Advance marketing.* This type of marketing can include e-mail marketing, e-zine newsletters, direct mail promotions, faxes, etc. First, do your homework on your targeted audience; make sure your list is well-defined and truly bona fide. Next, have a single, clear-cut objective for your fax, e-mail, or promotional letter. Then, make sure your communication is unique and will stand out. Finally, commit to frequent communications, not a one-time campaign.

✓ *Personal contact marketing.* This type of marketing involves either in-person contact with potential customers or telephone contact. It includes referrals and testimonials, networking, customer site visits, customer seminars, and association involvement. One suggestion: Begin building an *advocate list*. This is a list of 25 to 40 clients, contacts, and friends who you believe will refer you to the most new sales opportunities. Stay in touch with your advocates at least once a month. When they provide a referral, send them a tangible reward—say, a book, tickets to a game, or at least a thank-you card.

✓ *Headliner marketing.* This type of marketing includes public speaking, writing articles, and obtaining publicity. It thrusts you or other company leaders into the limelight as the specialist.

And remember: Make sure you stay on message in every marketing piece. Every time a customer sees an ad or receives a marketing e-mail from you, it should reinforce your great reputation and those positive traits you hold dear—honesty, authenticity, and the absolute best customer service possible.

**Build goodwill inside and outside your company.** You may already know that the word *sell* derives from the Scandinavian root *selzig*, which literally means *to serve*. And that's what every company should be focused on—serving its customers rather than trying to squeeze the maximum number of bucks out of them while expending minimum effort. Companies with great reputations serve their customers so fervently that an almost unbreakable customer loyalty develops. Building an organization so focused on serving starts from within. It starts with company leaders showing their appreciation for their employees and employees showing respect for their leaders and each other.

“When goodwill is created within an organization, it will flow to the customers,” says Ludwig. “Employees will try extra hard to please customers because they feel like they are doing something important. They won't hesitate to go that extra mile by staying late to make sure a customer's order goes out or by skipping lunch one day to listen to a customer's concerns. Eventually the consistently great service you and your employees provide your customers will come back to you two-fold because satisfied customers not only remain loyal but also tell others how they were treated.”

When you make reputation a central tenet of your business strategy, an interesting thing happens: Your people will benefit as much as (or possibly even more than) your customers. You'll create an organization of more fulfilled, successful, and happy human

beings—and those are the kinds of employees who stand firmly by their work and who naturally talk up their company to anyone who will listen.

“Consider an interesting practice of the ancient Romans, who were known for their achievements in construction,” urges Ludwig. “When they finished building an arch, the engineer in charge was expected to stand beneath it when the scaffolding was removed. If the arch didn’t hold, he was the first to know. Encourage everyone at your organization to build its reputation, and, in turn, their own, so that they can stand beneath it with confidence and pride.”

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### **About the Author:**

George Ludwig is a recognized authority on sales strategy and peak performance psychology. An international speaker, trainer, and corporate consultant, he is currently the president and CEO of GLU Consulting. He helps clients like Johnson & Johnson, Abbott Laboratories, Northwestern Mutual, CIGNA, and numerous others improve sales force effectiveness and performance.

Though it’s George’s strategies and processes that help corporations increase productivity and performance, it’s his tremendous energy and dynamism that spark the transformation. Again and again, clients remark on his amazing ability to unleash human capacity and inspire men and women to break out of their comfort zones. The result is a whole new type of salesperson.

His customized presentations teach achievers to make stunning advances in their lives. From helping salespeople realize cherished dreams to helping corporations exponentially accelerate revenue streams, George Ludwig leaves audiences and individuals empowered, emboldened, and clamoring for more.

George is the best-selling author of *Power Selling: Seven Strategies for Cracking the Sales Code* and *Wise Moves: 60 Quick Tips to Improve Your Position in Life & Business*. He’s also a columnist and frequent contributor to *Entrepreneur magazine*, *Investor’s Business Daily*, *Selling Power*, and numerous business radio programs. Having gained a reputation as a thought leader in his industry, he is frequently interviewed for trade publications and newspapers.

### **About the Book:**

*Power Selling: Seven Strategies for Cracking the Sales Code* (Kaplan Publishing, ISBN: 0-7931-8571-8, \$19.95) is available at bookstores nationwide and from all major online booksellers.

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