

Dealer ADVOCATE

The Power of Relationship Marketing

Jim Ziegler



I had a half hour conversation with my good friend, Richard Parsons, yesterday. It was basically a social call, no business agenda whatsoever -- just a lengthy personal chat.

You're probably wondering why this is relevant to this article. Simple. Richard lives in Salisbury, Wiltshire -- in the UK. He and I met on the social network, Ecademy.com three years ago. I have more than 25,000 first-generation connections on that network alone. When Debbie and I visited London in October of 2008, Richard was one of literally several hundred friends in the UK we had met online who came out on several occasions just to meet us.

I was working at my desk and saw Richard was online so I put on my headset, turned on the camera and called him on Skype, the online voice and video service. Here we were chatting, laughing, discussing current events and talking about other people we both knew...with the Atlantic Ocean separating us, seeing each other on video in real time as we visited.

Not exaggerating, I speak to literally dozens of Brits (some Scots and Irish) every week -- they all use Skype. The cost to call virtually any land-based telephone in the world on Skype is about \$20 a year unlimited calls.

This is not an advertisement for Skype, but rather an incredible statement about the awesome power of social networks and the

advancements in technology-enabled productivity. I spoke to a friend in Great Britain for a half hour at virtually no cost to me with video in real time.

Think about it. Would that possibility have even been on your radar screen ten years ago?

In my book, *The Prosperity Equation, New Millennium*, I wrote, "The most powerful people on earth are those people who influence the most other people."

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and yes, even the overseas based networks Ecademy and Xing, give us the ability today to expand to overwhelming multiples the number of relationships, real friendships and business connections -- as many as we can manage and keep up with.

A few days later, Debbie and I headed to Las Vegas to attend the 9th Digital Dealer Conference and Exposition, which is sponsored and produced by this magazine. I was a speaker again -- a session for dealers and decision-makers only -- on how to mesh traditional sales and marketing processes with the new technologies, what works, what doesn't -- and who's blowing smoke in unconventional places.

There were more than 80 exhibitors at the conference and dealers were able to sort through the vendors, look at what they offer side-by-side in the same exposition hall. In this fast-moving, ever-changing landscape of technology-enabled sales and marketing

they're all saying they have the magic dust -- the silver bullet -- that will help your dealership achieve Internet Domination, letting you crush all competitors. But be careful, if something warm is running down your leg, it might not be Kool-Aid.

I went there to be a student as well as an information provider. This is the definitive conference, the original, the best Internet-technology marketing conference in the automobile business. You need to make it a point to be there for the Spring (Orlando, April 19-21) conference with your key people.

In recent months I've visited more than a dozen dealerships nationwide and actually worked the sales desk and worked with customers on the floor, examined the Internet and BDC departments, reviewed the dealerships' marketing strategies and processes. I can tell you from first person eyeball observation most of you are being slaughtered by a tiny minority of dealerships that really get it and really do it.

Stealth Internet ninja marketers are coming in under the radar screen and virtually abducting your customers -- and you're not seeing it except on the reports after the fact.

With more than a billion people on social networks worldwide every day -- it's where the market is.

You need to dive in, fully immersed, not just half-hearted, but rather fully committed. The dealerships that dominate in