

CASE IN POINT: The Real Reason People Aren't Beating Down the Door to Be Your Client

A marketing expert for older adults reveals how to increase sales while better serving your community and clients.

By Mark Hager

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THE REAL REASON People aren't Beating Down the Door to be Your Client



A marketing expert for older adults reveals how to increase sales while better serving your community and clients. BY MARK HAGER

If you want to continue to grow your company serving older adults and increase revenue, it is imperative that you are able to reach the customers you are best able to serve. Your process to secure new clients needs to be efficient, effective, and provide a high return for your investment. However, most small business owners are unable to successfully tap into their local market well enough to generate the revenue required to reach their goals.

The reason that is true generally boils down to one very important issue: *Your best customers don't see you as relevant to their lives.*

I know this, because I've been an aging-in-place business consultant and coach for nearly thirteen years. During that time I've worked with small, local companies, manufacturers, tech startups, and entrepreneurs in just about every area related to aging in place. I've taught people across the globe, been referenced in textbooks, served as an aging-in-place expert for a national television brand and worked one-on-one with older couples planning their futures.

So, it is with confidence that I tell you: If you want to transform your future, you'll have to learn how to become better aligned with the right older customers for your company. When you do that, you'll be able to focus less on selling and more on doing what you love: helping people transform their own lives while being paid well to do it.

Some Perspective

In our world of the connected customer, relevance is marketing and a customer's experience is the yardstick. That is especially true for older adults who have been advertised to their entire lives; most turn a deaf ear to it.

Shifting your focus can transform your business into one where you are increasing revenue, and getting more, higher quality leads. These changes can reduce the friction of selling and get you to the point where you can focus on your purpose: revenue, service, reach, impact — whatever the goals are that you have.

The One Issue, Explained

Nearly every business owner I've talked with in the last twelve-plus years has had the following issue. I can almost guarantee you it is something you are up against right now to some degree. If you don't solve it, you will most likely just stay where you're at, or worse, go backwards.

Your offers don't align properly with your best customers.

Now, I'm going to show you some of the reasons why you are not matching up to your local aging market. In reality, this is probably why you aren't growing as much or as fast as you think you should.

- **Your marketing isn't bringing in enough of the right new customers.** This is almost always an alignment problem. Meaning, what you say is different than what these older adults need to hear about your service or product to help them see a better version of their future.

- **You aren't talking with people who will pay.**

What you're saying about your company or services may be appealing to the wrong type of customer. Someone who, for whatever reason, won't or can't pay you for what you offer.

- **The people who will buy from you don't know that they should buy from you.** Maybe they don't understand that their problem can be solved (or that they even have a problem). Perhaps they have an outlook based in fear and not hope.

So, in the end, you're not aligned with or reaching the people who could be your best customers. The reality is that a company with almost no relevance can generate some revenue. However, a company that focuses on aligning with the best customers for its business can position itself to generate much more revenue.

Why Does This Happen?

There are reasons why so many business owners focused on the aging population have a difficult time making their relevance match up to their revenue goals.

The first reason is they may not know they have a problem. Maybe they never learned enough specifically about how people act as consumers. Or, perhaps never learned a better way to talk about or market their services and products. In my experience, this is almost always the case.

Second, once business owners know about the problem, they may not think they have time to address the issues. They feel overwhelmed already with all of the tasks on their plates. If that's you, maybe you've fallen into the trap so many business owners do, where you're mired because you feel overworked already in your business.

You can't work on it when you're up to your neck in it.

I can understand why you may feel that way. But, here's the problem: If you're going to achieve the goals you have for your company, you've got to get out of that mindset. If not, you essentially wake up every day faced with the same choice: You can either do what it takes to grow and meet your dreams, or you can continue what you're doing to keep the train on the rails.

Fix Your Alignment

Of course, all of these issues can be fixed. You've already seen that how relevant you are to the right type of older adult client is directly tied to your revenue. The steps forward are to begin reshaping your business

so it fits better with the right customers for your company. To get started, ask yourself these questions:

1. How many leads do I get a week?
2. Where do they come from? Referrals? Website? Publications? Ads?
3. Out of those, how many are actually well-qualified leads with people I want to work with?
4. How many of those do I actually close? Two percent? Five percent? More?
5. How difficult is it to close a sale?
 - » Do too many people miss/break appointments?
 - » Do I feel like I am educating people *too much* during a sales conversation? (Does it make me feel like I'm having to talk them into it?)
6. Do I feel like I am getting too many objections or have to answer too many similar questions?

Without knowing some particulars about your company, there's no way to judge where you really are on the scales. But if you want a quick bird's-eye view where you really are and what may be holding you back, these questions are a good place to start.

Digging into the answers can begin to reveal how relevant you are with your ideal customer. For instance, how many leads you're getting or how qualified they are might indicate if you're reaching the right people. Difficulty closing may indicate you're using the wrong approach or words to talk about what you do both before and during the sale.

Action Steps

With this new insight into your company, how do you begin closing that gap? Below, I've outlined a few steps you can take to start moving forward.

- **Your clients.** Revisit who your best customers are. Get an understanding of what they are like, what they want and (most importantly) what fears may be holding them back from taking action.
- **Your language.** Based off your newly acquired client comprehension, create a way to talk about what you do that is easily understood and inspires the people you want to serve. (Obviously, you shouldn't infer anything that makes them think

they need you because they are old, sick, broken, etc.) Just be factual, compassionate, and respectful, while being gentle with sensitive topics.

- **Your message.** Speak to their problems (whether they know they have them or not). Talk about the results they can experience (that you know they need or want). Make emotional connections and tell stories that illustrate a transformation. Don't bullet-point your process; you lose people.

Focus on educating people and giving value. Keep giving it until you coach people into becoming your client. Your goal is to become the ever-present advisor.

- **Your local platform.** In order for this new way of doing business to succeed, you need to create a way to spread your message locally to older adults who want to keep building their best life. I call these channels to your potential customers "your local platform." You create this platform by creating the pathways to get your company and message spread. Eventually, it can work (somewhat) independently of you; that means it'll generate a return without having to babysit it all the time. Your local platform should consist of:

- » Local media attention,
- » Speaking/teaching engagements,
- » Outreach to compatible organizations,
- » Professional networking leading to strategic partnerships, and a
- » Website that dominates local searches.

Creating this machine will give you a bigger footprint and influence people who can buy.

- **Your processes.** Oftentimes, some of the most frustrating situations between a customer and a business is because of a process that business has in place. You have to move toward a "What makes this easier on my customer?" mentality when it comes to how you do things. **This is especially true when you are serving older adults.** (I can't stress that enough.) Here are a few ideas to get you moving in the right direction.

Make it easy. There are innumerable studies that

talk about why customers leave companies. Those studies cite everything from “They don’t feel important” to “They don’t get value” to “The company doesn’t have good customer service.”

The one way to circumvent all of that is to do everything you can to make it easy; easy to learn, discuss, buy, get help, or even to share you.

Make it personal. Give undivided attention during any interaction. Use people’s names in every situation you can (not just when it is convenient).

Make them want to talk about it. Every company needs people to talk about the great experience they

had using their service. So give them an experience they can’t help spreading.

By focusing on these things, you will create a situation for yourself where you become that advisor. First, they see or hear about you. Then, they learn that you know them, that you are trustworthy, and that you care. Those qualities make them decide you are someone they should do business with.

If you can take these steps, you’ll begin to see a great change in the number and quality of your clients. And, that will lead to ever-increasing revenue for you.

CASE STUDY

Scenario:

After working with and teaching hundreds of small business owners who serve older adults over the years, I know that they are generally very adept at providing their services and applying their skills. Yet, so many constantly feel burdened, inadequate, or otherwise overwhelmed with the task of running a company and attracting new clients. It always feels like an uphill battle. The following example illustrates one such business owner who switched lanes from a being a general contractor providing high-end remodeling to being a specialist focusing completely on aging-in-place remodeling and home accessibility. The scenario covers some of the obstacles he had to face in order to achieve his revenue and business goals.

Discussion:

Greg Miles was a general contractor who had spent years building a home remodeling company. By chance, he worked on a project for an older couple and discovered the idea of aging in place. After much research in order to complete the project to make their home safer and easier to live in, he was hooked.

He was convinced that aging-in-place remodeling

could be a fulfilling and profitable niche for his company. He was frustrated, though. The steps he had already taken to bring in aging-in-place projects, including several he had completed, weren’t going to be adequate to fulfill his goal of a sound financial future for his company. He sincerely wanted to move away from general remodeling completely and focus solely on aging in place. But he was unable to generate enough revenue to justify it.

In reality, Greg had a lot in his favor with hundreds of general remodeling projects under his belt. His passion to serve older adults was reflected in his commitment to learning, earning certifications, and creating new services aimed at older adults. He started marketing these new services: buying ads in various publications, attending home shows, and building a new website. But he found himself continually second-guessing his decision to focus on aging in place. He was just not able to consistently get the right projects working with older clients.

What Greg didn’t realize was that he was experiencing something that most business owners go through, especially in the aging space. He had a deep desire to help older adults, skills he could use,



and business know-how. But those attributes don't necessarily translate into working with older adults. He was doing what he had always done, by and large, but it wasn't generating leads. In addition, he also was managing his company the same way, which produced the same experience for his clients. Of course, that earned nearly the same revenue. None of these were getting him where he wanted to go financially or professionally.

After some time working with several older clients, it became evident to Greg that what he was offering didn't resonate with them. To be clear, he knew his solutions were sound. He had the knowledge and could build what he proposed. However, the fact remained he had little-to-no buyers for aging-in-place solutions. His marketing and offers just didn't have the draw. It wasn't until we had a few sessions together that he began to understand the roots of his problem:

- The mindset and life experience of these older clients was different than that of other age groups, and their actions didn't always line up with their goals (true for any age group).

- Their history, fears, and perspectives factor into purchasing decisions.
- The group has specific communication preferences, differences in the customer journey, and a desire to align with trusted professionals.
- Their overall experience with his company (before, during, and after a project) was what his company would be judged on.

This new understanding led him to take his first steps to become better aligned with the right older customers. Greg could now identify who those people actually were. After examining his existing customers, he could contrast that group with what he'd learned about modern older adults. He worked to define his perfect older customers, including their goals, means, what they need (or would need, whether they knew it or not), as well as a series of offers that could provide them the best results. After that, he finally was crystal clear on who he was best suited to serve and what he could provide them. That effort alone reduced his stress and made him feel so much more in control of his future.

Another thing Greg already knew was that his marketing was not working. It seemed no matter what he did, it didn't bring in enough of the right customers. Sure, he had followed up on lots of leads, but most of the people could not or would not pay for the services they needed. In other cases, they weren't convinced that his services were what they needed.

While going through the earlier exercises, Greg realized his marketing was not performing because it was not addressing the right clients *for him*. Specifically, he saw he needed to change how he talked about what he did, why aging in place was important (addressing fears, goals) and the amount of consumer education he built into his marketing. It was clear that being a trusted advisor held great rewards for both him and the people he served; he just needed to work toward becoming that to them.

So we worked together to create new language to be included in every aspect of his marketing and public relations (PR). Since he now had a good idea of how to educate people vs. selling to them, it was much easier to develop the new material for him to use in print, online, in presentations, in person, and in the media.

One of the other realizations Greg had was that his marketing and PR was not very comprehensive; not in content or in coverage. He knew about a customer's journey and how it was important to address. He just hadn't realized that, in today's world, the journey for proactive, older adult consumers generally requires more education and touchpoints (ways that a business can interact with customers, such as a website, person-to-person, at speaking engagements, through an app, etc.). With his new marketing language and a plan to create a system to leverage multiple local avenues to get to these customers, Greg was poised to create the local platform he needed to become that trusted authority.

A significant issue he knew he had was that his website didn't generate enough quality leads. (Hardly any, actually.) He had spent considerable money on having it built, but it was not paying him back by any means. One of the first projects we worked on together was recreating all the content on his website so it ranked high on the first page of Google search results for services that made him the most money by optimizing related phrases. Though a longterm project, it quickly began to generate new older adult leads and clients.

Greg had always tried to provide great customer service. Getting positive comments and reviews from

past clients was fairly easy. However, he realized that he needed a way to take his company from good service to one that provided an amazing customer experience. Clients let him know when things weren't done right, and he listened and changed his practices if their complaints were valid. But he knew he needed more specific feedback in order to begin to fully align with his older clients, not just to rack up more testimonials, but so that he could incrementally apply that feedback to how he did business and increase client enjoyment of the whole experience.

Over time, we worked together to create a series of processes for his teams to use to gather feedback, understand the current satisfaction level of the client, and provide data and input Greg could use to improve their overall experience. Once he began to implement these, he was much more in touch with each project and his clients were even more happy with the work he did for them. His employees and contractors loved having less stress (especially when things weren't going exactly right) and a way to highlight issues to ensure things were dealt with quickly. As a side benefit, Greg was able to rest more. Gone were the days of lurching headlong from one task to another and from one problem to the next.

Greg's role in his company began to change the minute he began to refine his processes. He's still the owner, but he was able to stop beating the bushes for new customers (or doing all those tasks that used to eat up his time, but resulted in little-to-no return). He was able to accomplish his first major goals to exclusively provide aging-in-place or home accessibility remodeling, and generate revenue in excess of one million dollars per year. His overall experience as a business owner improved since shifting his focus to getting the right new clients. Also, he felt an incredible sense of calm knowing there was a plan in place to deal with many of the things that had caused him stress over the years. After awhile, he started working about half as many hours as he had been. The result was that Greg was able to focus on volunteering, living a more fulfilling life, and starting new ventures that complement his existing company's work. •CSA



Mark Hager is a consultant, coach, and teacher who helps leaders reach, market to, and sell to their best customers over age fifty. He is a respected authority in the aging-in-place space. Mark is the founder of AgeInPlace.com, as well as a featured media expert, speaker, and consumer coach. Contact him at mark@markhager.com, 865-236-1247 or visit markhager.com.