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## I'D APPRECIATE A REFERRAL

I'm trying to build my newsletter business and I value your help.

Do you know of a company that could use my assistance with their existing newsletter, or a business or association you've worked with that has talked about doing a newsletter but hasn't done one?

I'm looking for companies, associations and non-profits that are seeking more effective ways to communicate with their employees, customers, members and donors.

I would not only appreciate your referral, but I will reward you handsomely if it turns into my customer.

Thanks for your help.

— Jeff Rubin



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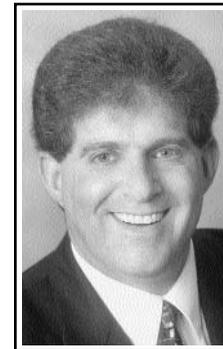
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# The Write Stuff

A quarterly compendium of writing tips and other useful information

## DON'T DIVORCE ... REMODEL!



JEFF RUBIN

**O**f all the articles that have appeared in the 10-year history of this newsletter, I got more response to the last issue's article on "Surviving a Home Remodel" than any-

thing else I've written.

Some called or wrote to congratulate me. Some called to commiserate. I heard several horror stories. People left with half-completed kitchens by unscrupulous contractors. Financial ruin. Marriages ended.

What this tells me is that I have a lot of divorced friends (I'M KIDDING!). What it really tells me is that, as in most of my life's experiences, there's always something learned from a situation that can be applied to my business.

I'm truly flabbergasted at how

some people sabotage their businesses by being irresponsible, unreliable and uncommunicative. Chronic lateness, not showing up on time (or at all), not returning phone calls — I was warned all of these were hallmarks of contractors. In truth, they are common to many business people.

I was set to hire a cabinetmaker for nearly \$9,000, but when he failed to appear to sign the contract (twice!) I found someone else. Several other potential contractors were similarly unreliable and unaccounted for.

What I've learned (and I suspect I already knew this) is that research, preparation and hiring the right people can make any endeavor successful, whether it's a home remodeling project or a small business.

### RESEARCH

When my wife and I decided to remodel, we began looking for everything we'd need - bathroom vanities, shower stall, bathtub, mirrors, closet doors, cabinets, granite, appliances, flooring, lighting, etc. — long before the work began. We looked every-

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## DON'T DIVORCE ... REMODEL!

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where, at all kinds of materials, and ended up with a file that was three inches thick. We started in July for a project that began in November.

#### PREPARATION

When demolition began, we were ready. Everything needed to remodel these two rooms — two vanities, mirrors, lighting, a bathtub, three sets of closet doors, faucets, a shower head — was on-site. The job finished on time.

When the kitchen contractor began work, the appliances and accoutrements — sink, faucet, flooring, lighting, etc. — were in the garage. It was not uncommon for my contractor to say, "Tomorrow, we're going to need this, this and this," and for me to reply, "it's here, here and here."

#### HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

I'd used my bathroom contractor, Tim Wright, to build my deck a few years before, so I knew



### Put it in Writing Partners

**W**e recommend these businesses, which give discounts to our readers:

**ALPHAGRAPHICS,**  
Walnut Creek, 925/937-4700 (Greg).

**PINOLE COPY CENTER,**  
Pinole, 510/223-8901 (Judy).

**SCAN ART GRAPHICS,**  
(pre-press), Emeryville  
510/595-2222 (Fred or Ron). ■

I'd get great quality work.

I asked people for recommendations on a general contractor for the kitchen, and the same name kept coming up.

I liked Dan Johnson right from the start, when he talked about how he insisted his crews be on time and on schedule. Though I had visited a few of his job sites (he had built a new auto body repair facility for one of my newsletter customers) and knew his work was high quality, I didn't hire him on the spot.

Then I ran into him about 10 days later in a Chinese restaurant, and we had a nice chat. He told me his attitude about people who don't show up or return phone calls (he doesn't tolerate them). I decided between the wonton soup and the chow fun that he was the guy.

So ... how does this apply to you and your business? Think about what makes you successful and why your customers hire you. You'll find the answers there.

## CHATTING OVER LUNCH

By Patricia Katz

**S**o here I am in the Denver airport with three hours between flights and a hunger for lunch. With that much time to spare, I opt for sit-down service instead of a grab and run sandwich. Within moments of placing my order, it becomes clear that I'm dining in a phone booth not a restaurant.

For the next hour, the woman beside me calls friend after friend leaving voice mail messages until she lucks into someone who is 'in' with time to spare. A 30-minute gossip-fest ensues. I'm inundated with way too much information about this stranger's life.

Across the aisle, two businessmen share a table, but not each other's company. The first juggles two phone calls. Switching between holds, he alternates between arguing with his wife and verbally abusing an employee. His table-mate is also in full phone mode, swapping derogatory stories about Client X with a colleague at the other end of the call.

Seated at the table next to the dynamic duo, are three young business types — all ignoring each other and each engaged in a separate telephone conversation.

For the record, I do enjoy



PATRICIA KATZ

people watching. However, I have no desire to be an unwilling participant in someone else's daily soap opera, or privy to their marital secrets; and, for all businessman #2 knew, I could be associated with the client he was bad-mouthing.

At first blush, the phones seem incidental to the problem, because you can catch snatches of similar conversations between people at neighboring tables in any restaurant.

However, each of these callers was speaking, not in a moderated voice for the ears of someone just across the table, but to an audience at a distance. To a person, they projected with a volume that

assured their messages made it through the phone link (and consequently throughout the restaurant).

Secondly, the situation seemed to be awkward not just for me, but for their table-mates during the bits of time they were not "on-line" themselves. What do you do? Do you blatantly watch and listen in on the call? Do you fervently assess the condition of your fingernails, or do you manufacture a reason to leave the table?

Finally, no one seemed to be listening to anyone else. This veritable Tower of Babel was enough to give a person indigestion. And it did!

So what do I suggest? Can the public chatter, or at least rein it in. I'm pausing to check my own cell phone behavior and its impact on others. I invite you to do the same. Together we need to figure out how best to manage this technology in ways that work for us all.

By the way, it's bon appétit, not phone appétit!

— Patricia Katz, owns Optimus Consulting, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. This article is from her e-zine, "PAUSE — The Voice of Sanity in a Speed Crazy World." Visit [www.patkatz.com](http://www.patkatz.com) for more information.

