

Funnel Vision: What "Mistakes" Can Teach You

When people first create products, they make a lot of mistakes. The most common is failure to create a business plan.

These are the same people who fail to set up a strong sales funnel. You'll know them because you won't remember who on earth they are when one of their emails lands in your inbox. You might be offended by language that you find off-putting and aggressive; or too formal and pedantic... You might wonder why they're offering to teach you to make your own olive oil, when you hate cooking and always eat frozen dinners. In other words, you're going to be put off by emails (and people) that aren't in sync with your thinking (or needs): Particularly if it's been so long since they wrote, you don't remember who they are.

These are all people who get an idea and fall into the trap of "tunnel" thinking - not "funnel" thinking. And you don't want to end up as one of them!

Just as there are specific elements that make up strong sales funnel, these people all rush (very sincerely, in many cases) into a specific batch of common mistakes. And that's why they comprise the 88% who never make the grade; who fizzle out like a soggy firecracker.

We've already spoken about **pre-qualifying your subscribers**, and **the importance of timing**; but there's a lot more to learn about creating successful sales funnels

It's true, people learn from mistakes. And you can certainly learn from theirs!

Step One: Top ten mistakes -- Familiarize yourself with ten of the most common sales funnel disasters...

1. **Not pre-qualifying** -- Thinking that the larger the number of readers, the better. Wasting time trying to reach people who will never progress to the buying stage, and who "bale" in search of new freebies when it comes time to open their wallets. Not making sure that you're weeding out those who will waste your time (and damage your PayPal or Clickbank credibility and status) by creating a high refund rate. Those who need too much hand-holding (because your sales letter convinced them your method was "easy", when in truth your offerings are for experts in that niche.)
2. **Trying to be all things to all people.** Eerily similar to "not pre-qualifying"... but this mistake is a lot more scary. You see, the people who try to be all things to all people often do research their niche brilliantly, collect all the right data, identify the perfect subscriber... and then either get so absorbed in one aspect they forget to focus on the forest as well as the next tree... or they can't seem to resist the compulsion to present their first sign up offer to as many people as possible. (It's rather like offering experienced dressage riders a free clinic with

an Olympic dressage champion... and then letting people who simply want to trail ride into the class at the last minute. Think what a disaster that would be! (You'd end up pleasing no one.)

3. **Not providing irresistible value** -- A token "free report" isn't likely to lead to a marriage proposal. (Translation: Careless contact methods don't create lifelong, trusting relationships). For example: Who would you date -- the slobby guy who walks up to you, cold turkey, and acts like it's a foregone conclusion that you're going to want an intimate dinner at his place (even though you don't even know his name) and whose hair looks like it hasn't had a decent wash in days... or that really nice guy named Scott that you chat to about three times a week, waiting in line for your twin Moccachocalattos at the Gourmet Coffee Shop? The one who knows exactly what a challenge it can be to fit dog-walking into a busy lifestyle, who knows your sister is about to have her third baby... and who has listened to you complain about being "invisible" -- then given you really great tips (that worked) on how to make your boss notice you?
4. **Not planning for the back end** -- The "back end" is where all the "gold" is found. These are customers who have already bought; who turn into repeat customers and die-hard fans -- the sort who buy every offering (no matter how high the price) and who feel they have earned their way to your "inner circle".

Remember -- the back end is where **90% of your profits will ultimately be made.**

5. **Not understanding what tools you need -- and how (an when) to use them** -- That's like deciding to bake a chocolate cake, looking at photos of the Ultimate Cake -- but not understanding you need flour and chocolate as two of the main ingredients (on top of not knowing how to turn on the oven).

To do business on the web and create working sales funnels, you will need to have:

- **A target market** -- one you've identified accurately, down to the typical individual subscriber's smallest details
- **A list** of subscribers to sell products to (and become your eager affiliates)
- A subscription with an **internet service provider**
- A well-optimized **domain name** registered and transferred to your ISP for your landing page (preferably based on your keyword)
- **A blog** (either for your landing pages; or just for staying in contact with or teaching your subscribers)

- **A website** (many people prefer to house landing pages on separate websites; and if you have more than one business site or offer, you may want a main site to provide links to all the related ones)
 - **An autoresponder** (you won't get far, if you have a sign up process that isn't automated.) And you need to understand how autoresponders work -- even if you outsource set up to a virtual assistant.
 - **A knowledge of HTML or WordPress** (if you want to set up landing and sales pages yourself)
 - **Focused, fascinating content** -- and that should extend even to your Twitter tweets.
 - **Reliable outsource contractors** lined up, if you'd prefer to let the latter design your landing pages, content or websites for you. (Be sure to research their fees and payment expectations.)
 - **A Payment Processor or Shopping Cart** -- even if you're just planning to keep it simple and use only PayPal. (Be sure to check out their rules: If you've really hit your target market right and your subsequent paid products are eagerly snapped up and go viral, you risk losing thousands of dollars, if PayPal suddenly decides you've got the wrong sort of account.)
 - **Specific short-term and long-term goals** -- both for yourself, and your target subscriber
6. **Not planning to have affiliates.** These die-hard fans can bring you more money, very quickly, than you could ever generate on your own. So build in things like providing FAQ pages, banners, PLR and other resources ready to go, when creating your sales funnel, so that they can begin to make extra money for you right away. (FACT: A good percentage of productive affiliates have decided a product is not for them... but promote it anyway because they can see its value.) Also factor in affiliate commissions (you'll want to make them generous or even 100%, if you're just starting out) when you're setting your prices
 7. **Not planning to attract JV partners.** The fact is, you will most likely be able to pick up an experienced, dynamite joint venture partner to promote your offer almost straight away if (a) your offer is perfect for his list members (b) you've got a strong, unique offer perfect for that market. Both JV partners and affiliates can make you more money in a month than you could generate alone in a lifetime!
 8. **Not realizing that everything has a beginning and an end.** While you really do want to turn customers into loyal, lifetime fans, recognize the fact that while all your highly-targeted subscribers start out valuing your entry offer, the majority will have exit points along your sales funnel -- probably in different

places. This is perfectly natural. The real trick is to direct these exit points yourself and help them out the door (further pre-qualification), so that you make money (and retain goodwill) by pointing your exiting customers to (a) the right person or product to help them on the new leg of their journey (b) other campaigns you may have, to fit their needs better at this time.

To go back to our horseback-riding example... You may be the perfect person to teach everybody the basics of horseback riding... but once they've mastered these, they'll want to specialize and narrow their horseback riding experiences to those areas they've discovered give them the most pleasure.

Someone could start out thinking they want to end up in the world of Grand Prix show jumping... but then discover that Dressage is totally where their real passion ignites.

When these people reach the end of the "learning how to ride" phase, you want to be able to direct them to their next equestrian adventure -- even if it's not with you. (And why not make some money along the way?)

If you're an expert show jumper and dressage rider, you can create two more sales funnels, inviting your newly-advanced riders to your show jumping courses or dressage workshops... but if they've fallen in love with barrel racing and that's completely outside your own interest or experience, you might make an arrangement with a barrel-racing expert you respect and send her your more Western-minded students.

It's just the same with an online business. Just as a specialist in "English" riding isn't going to waste time presenting themselves as a "Western" expert (which would just undermine their own credibility, if they did), don't force yourself to be all things to all people.

Specialize... and refer. (The people you send them to will likely return the favor.)

9. **Forgetting that sales funnels are always about lead generation** -- building that list! (And you should have separate lists for not only separate campaigns, but for separate segments within each campaign. E.G. People who haven't bought yet; people who have purchased your e-Book; people in your Membership Site, *et cetera*.)
10. **Not maximizing every opportunity within each sales funnel.** For example, you can capture paying subscribers straight away with special pre-launch offers, as well as with exclusive follow up offers. You can capture your subscriber with a free webinar -- then give her the option of purchasing your recording. (This seems to go down better if you make the recording available for 24 hours after the webinar, letting the subscriber know they can always purchase it, if they miss the free access hours.)

You can also use sales funnel post-sale emails for multiple purposes, to generate not only leads but also:

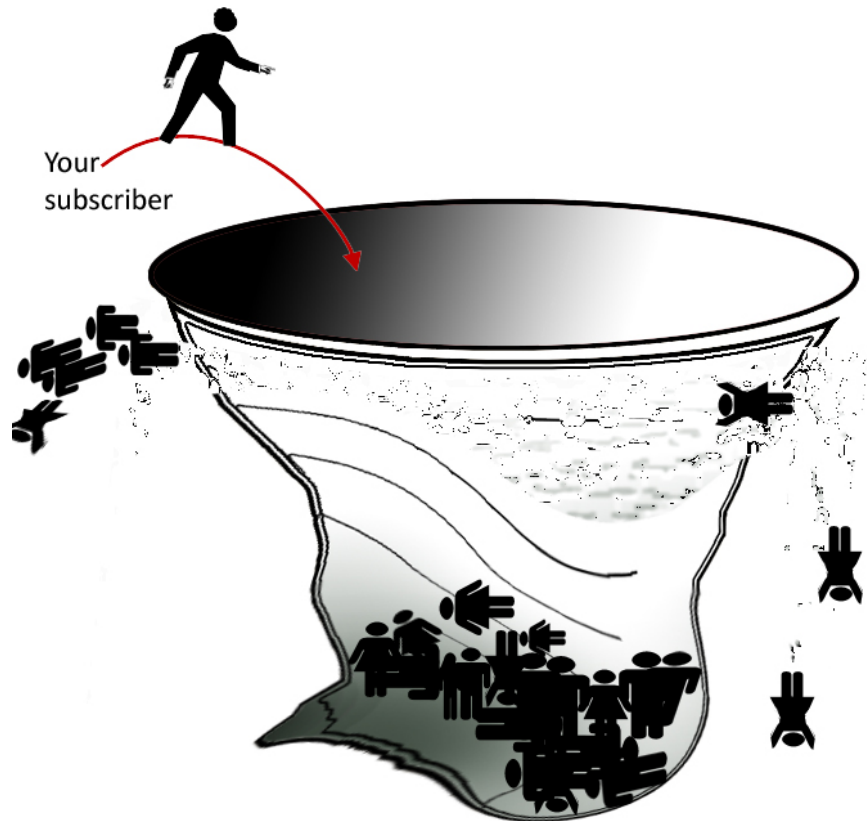
- Feedback
- Testimonials
- Referrals
- Affiliate signups
- Lead generation for new campaigns (new sales funnel entries)

Step Two: Allow for the Psychology of Marketing Mistakes

People make these mistakes usually because of only one or two reasons:

1. **They don't understand online business well enough** to know what's needed for a really strong, smoothly-flowing sales funnel
2. **They get over-focused on the details** and rush into initiating complete steps, without remembering to keep the big picture in mind

If you don't understand how online business operates and what components and steps are needed in your sales funnel, it will end up looking more like this:



What you're actually looking at is a bottleneck. That's when the flow is suddenly halted by either a "pinch" in your funnel... or a "bulge" (right before a pinch) where everyone collects and gathers, without being able to progress further.

That's what you get when contact emails and offers aren't sequenced properly: When you either have the wrong type of contact (the little guys to the left who are all bursting out of your funnel way too soon because you've misidentified their needs); dead-end contact -- where the little gals on the right find themselves suddenly spat out, with no place else to go (there's seemingly nothing to follow that first freebie) -- and finally, all of the remainder jamming up together in the infamous bottleneck, where they get "stuck".

Bottlenecks are particularly dangerous to your reputation because they usually mean you've promised a smooth journey with a successful outcome... but now you're all lost together, milling around like a herd of confused sheep.

Keeping contact consistent and regular (and keeping offers well-timed; not all jammed one on top of the other) will help you avoid bottlenecked and broken sales funnels.

1. How to Clear a Bottleneck

But what if you've tried your hardest, and you've already created a bottleneck? How do you fix that mistake and get your customer traffic flowing smoothly again?

- 1. Identify those customers who are really "done" with your funnel, but don't know where to go next.** Then send them out of the existing funnel -- either with an invitation to a new funnel tailored for their needs... or to a relevant affiliate product or service.
- 2. With the remainder, test the waters** to see what the problem is. If they're simply refusing to move on and buy a \$97 a month Gold Level Membership, invite them to a free one-month trial of your Gold Level Membership. If you've developed your membership site correctly, the value should be so high that once they try this level out, they discover they can't live without it -- and this group starts to "move" again.

That's not the only strategy, of course -- just an example. You could try different emails, to see if the problem is in your content. Slowing down your emails, to give them time to "process" the information they've just downloaded from you. If you suspect price is the issue (i.e. you misidentified the financial status of this group), try giving different payment options: Then pay careful attention to which one the majority preferred, if the group starts moving again.

Be creative... if the above methods don't work, or don't seem to be applicable, trying simply asking what the problem is. Throw a new webinar into the mix that overcomes objections, if you're getting a lot of picky comments. Find out if something's not clear; or if there's one part of your software causing enough

confusion that your customers actually abandon it. (No point trying to introduce the next level, when they haven't mastered the first one!)

If something is broken, fix it. Announce the fix. Celebrate the fix. Thank those who pointed out the problem (actually, they deserve a medal for helping you!)

Step Three: Meet the Early Exit-ers

Another group to that can sabotage your funnel, resulting in poor conversion: Subscribers who opt out, the instant they've grabbed your goodie.

There will always be a small group of "freebie seekers" who do this, but if more subscribers bale than buy, you know you've got a problem.

Check out these possible causes:

1. You've mis-identified your target customer
2. Your offer was misleading or ambiguous
3. You promised, and didn't deliver
4. Your content was poor quality, repetitive and containing nothing new
5. You promised one thing and delivered another
6. They're not a group that spends money. They like all their information for free.
7. They love what you say... they just don't have the income to spend on your paid offerings
8. You made assumptions about this group, instead of checking them out carefully and doing your homework. (All it takes is one teenyweeny wrong assumption to create a disaster of "biblical proportions", as Bill Murray put it so succinctly in "Ghostbusters".)
9. You deliberately "tricked" them -- and wasted their time
10. You rushed them, and got the timing wrong on a funnel component

Sometimes, even when you have the best of intentions, you can find yourself guilty-as-charged with one or more of the above. For example, if you promise a special report all about "The Importance of Seals to the Environment", but don't make it clear that you're talking strictly about leaky vehicle seals resulting in toxic waste, you'll end up with

hundreds of annoyed animal lovers concerned about the Arctic seal hunt rushing away in disgust.

Meanwhile, the people who need your report the most (vehicle enthusiasts who care about the environment) will assume the same thing -- that your report is about the sort of silky, big-eyed little animals that Greenpeace loves to champion and fishermen like to club -- and he won't touch your free report with a ten-foot pole!

(So what was your crime, in this example? Door # 2: Your offer was both misleading and ambiguous.)

Once you're aware of the hidden pitfalls, it's easy to keep your eyes open for them as you're setting up your funnel.

Step Four: Welcome to the Psychology of Change

Another big mistake: Thinking that your customer is going to stay static throughout the journey -- that she's going to want the same things a year down the funnel that she did when she first helped herself to your sign up freebie.

You need to plan for customers to grow, and expect they will. Then anticipate what they'll need at each turn.

Remember we talked about the riders who (once they'd learned to ride) split off into specialty equestrian niches? The dressage riders, the show jumpers, the barrel racers, the gaited horse enthusiasts, the breeders, the trail riders, et cetera, et cetera...

You need to:

- Identify all the possible "branches" they're going to encounter -- and choose
- Decide which ones you can continue to serve and cater to
- Have a plan for sending them on their way (and making money and goodwill while doing so) to others who can help them continue their journey

And then you'll get your die-hards, who liked your initial offering because it dealt with a niche level they most enjoyed; one that was in their comfort zone. When you change and streamline your offerings, what will you do about that group?

Four suggestions that people have used with resounding success:

- **Offer free or paid "lifetime memberships"** that allow them to access your old content any time (releasing a few new pieces for their segment that you've finished with and won't be supporting, in the process). Let them know you're "retiring" from that aspect of your business and present this as a mark of how much you value their friendship. (But if your "lifetime membership" or access is free, be sure to let them know, in writing and on the content site, that there will be no further support for that content.)
- **Create a forum** for them to enjoy, so they become largely self-helping and self-sustaining within that group
- **Direct them to someone else** who can effectively cater to their unique needs (collecting your affiliate commission as you wave bye-bye)
- **Outsource maintenance of that segment to an employee, assistant or contractor**, so that the niche is served in your name, but you actually invest little to zero time dealing with a sector whose interests no longer match your own
- **Sell that particular business** (if you've had the forethought to set it up on an independent website, with its own branding.) Help the new owner be accepted by your loyal but no-longer-relevant fan

Understanding that you're going to change too and deciding in advance how you're going to handle that is an essential part of business planning -- one that will affect your sales funnels considerably.

Step Five: Avoid "Leaving the Money on the Table"

In spite of knowing these tips, there are still some people who are going to "leave the money on the table" -- that is, not pick up on all the opportunities to maximize the profit-making capacity of their sales funnels to the last dime.

They won't do it because they are lazy or careless: They'll do it because traps repeat themselves. And one of the biggest ones that newer marketers fall into -- again and again -- is losing sight of the big picture and getting absorbed in details.

If this happens to you, don't be hard on yourself. Marketing is like any other skill: It takes practice.

When you create your first free report, you'll most likely put your heart and soul into it, spend way too many hours (or weeks or months) on it -- and completely forget about timelines, promotion (until a week before the launch)... that is, unless you plan in advance and create a sales funnel.

In other words, don't just plan it in your head: Or on a cute little diagram of a tornado. Plan it in more detail, on a calendar. Work backwards, figuring out how much time you'll

need for each step. If you see your own potential "bottlenecks" (E.G. getting too hung up on learning how to use your Autoresponder) decide in advance what the most cost-effective way is, when it's time to tackle these potential money-leechers.

For example, consider hiring a virtual assistant, if loading your autoresponder and/or shopping cart are tasks that give you nightmares.

Hire a blog designer, if you're having trouble setting up that custom theme.

Hire a ghostwriter to write original material for you, or buy PLR (private label rights material), if you find writing articles, squeeze page content or sales letters an onerous, dreary task. (If you find writing dreary, it's a safe bet your readers will find your content dreary too!)

By now, you're probably realizing that we're really talking about another big, money-losing mistake, when you don't bother to plan your sales funnel (or don't set one up at all: And that's not outsourcing... and especially **not planning to outsource**.

Killing Your Sales Funnel Profits Softly

You see, there are two ways **not** to make the most money and please the most customers with your sales funnel.

- Throwing money away by neglecting opportunities to maximize profits (such as not sending those who exit off to another expert in your niche, picking up nice, fat affiliate commissions or JV profits in the process)
- Losing serious money by doing non-money-making tasks yourself

When deciding what to outsource, consider:

How much you're going to spend on outsourcing a task	versus	How much you'll make if you outsource it and devote your time to other pursuits
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Even if you can't afford it right now, remember that outsourcing is going to make you money -- so plan for it, further down the funnel. Fit it into your planning right now.

People who make these common mistakes are usually just like you and me. They sincerely want to serve their niche and be the best they can be. But without informed planning, tunnel vision sets in, steps get missed -- and before you know it, your sales funnel is wobbling off-kilter like a drunken tornado.

In our final installment, we'll take a look at back end strategies. But first, your assignment...

ASSIGNMENT:

Pop Quiz! (Don't worry, it's "open book" one, and you can refer back to this lesson for the answers...)

1. Complete these "biggest mistakes" people make (besides not using sales funnels in the first place):

Not _____

Trying to be _____

Not providing _____

Not planning for _____

Not understanding _____

Not planning to have _____

Not planning to attract _____

Not realizing that everything _____

2. What is a "bottleneck", and what are the two steps you need to take to clear one?
3. Identify at least **five causes of "early exits"** from your funnel -- and at least **three methods** of forestalling or correcting this.
4. Think about what you would like to outsource. Look up average fees charged by that particular type of contractor and compare this against the prices you're planning to charge, plus your existing budget.

Decide what one task or area you absolutely want to outsource, no matter what. Think about ways to achieve this as early as possible.