

COLUMNS

## Building a relationship in 3 seconds, or less

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Goldfish have a notoriously short attention span most say nine seconds. Despite the fact that our brains are bigger than the bowl a goldfish lives in, our attention span is shorter.

According to a recent study, the average adult's attention span is down to eight seconds, down from the 12-second attention span commonly cited a short 15 years ago. Most blame the "mobile revolution" for our flitting focus.

But this article is not about the "8-Second Rule" the rule that says you have to grab attention and send a memorable message in eight seconds or less because for most small businesses, the challenge is much bigger.

### Shrinking messages

Mobile convenience is giving business owners smaller spaces to present their message. As the message shrinks, the challenge grows.

Twitter is the prototypical bite-sized message, giving users only 140 characters to post their news and updates. Ten years later, its format has been a hit with users, as Twitter is the third-most popular social network, behind only Facebook and YouTube.

But social media is not the only place where the space and time we have to communicate is shrinking.

Potential customers will decide whether to open or trash your email based on the 100 characters that show in the "preview" in their inbox or on their mobile phone.

If you are running paid search with Google AdWords, you have only 95 characters to make an impression.

That means that 140 characters make for a lengthy message by some standards. How long does it take you to read a tweet? That is how long you have to reach your customer.

More importantly, how much can you say in 140 characters? How should you use that limited space?

### Three seconds

The problem with the eight-second rule is that you only get eight seconds if you earn them. Which means the challenge is actually much harder for business owners: they must earn that attention within the first three seconds.

You could do it with an image. But the cat is out of the bag: every other business is posting images, too. Competition is steep and crowded, so a photo alone will not cut it.

You cannot ignore the message. But between catchy slogans, taglines and hashtags, how do you stand out?

It is not easy. In fact, it is difficult to get it right. There is always a new theory to grab attention on mobile, another untested experiment being tried, and unproven strategies for online success that pop up every day.

When you set aside word count and image size and hashtags and colors, the one thing that must be at the heart of your message is a relationship.

Why relationship?

The goal of marketing is to stand apart, to set yourself apart from your competition. You cannot do that if you look like and sound like everyone else, and you certainly cannot do that if you are not working to build a relationship.

So many businesses focus their attention online strictly on the sale, never teaching why you are different or better, and never giving the potential customer a reason to pay attention for more than three seconds.

A relationship gives your customers a reason to pay attention, be loyal and interact. More importantly, it gives customers a reason to give you their attention.

IF YOUR BUSINESS was a person, how would you describe it? How does it interact with and relate to your customer?

Answering those questions is key to understanding how to craft your messages in a way that builds the relationship every time, even when you only have three seconds.

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