



WAVING GOOD-BYE WHEN YOU FORGOT TO SECURE THE TETHER LINE.

The Four Glaring Mistakes Private Investigators Make in Their Businesses.

By John A. Hoda, Veteran Private Investigator, and Business Coach

There are some estimates that 85% of all Private Investigators fail to renew their brand new license. A lot of time, money, and effort went into their business. What happened? Why did they decide to quit? In the twenty-two years that I have been in this business, I have come to know many investigators from around the globe. I have discovered the most glaring mistakes PIs make in their business.

1) Not Knowing What Business They Are In.

Sounds silly right? Saying that they are a licensed private investigator is correct, but it does not tell you what they do. Try my answer instead: I am a licensed professional investigator that seeks out the truth for Personal Injury and Criminal Defense attorneys on significant cases."

What business am I in? 'I'm in the P2P business or Professional to Professional business. I think I have coined that term.

The other business models are:

B2C, Business to Consumer; Fidelity and Custody investigations for regular people and family law attorneys come to mind.

B2B, Business to Business, Surveillance, and Casualty Investigations for Insurance Companies.

Expert or Specialist - Skip-tracing, Arson Origin & Cause, Executive Protection, Bug sweeps, and cell phone data extraction.

Generalist- You are the only game in the hard to reach place on the map. 'Martha's Vineyard, Northern Colorado on the Western Slope, The Virgin Islands are examples. People find you on the internet or through your networking in Associations, The Chamber of Commerce or networks. You do everything. Your remote geography is your Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

TIP-What is your "elevator speech," that is, what can you tell someone in the time it takes for an elevator to go up to your floor before you get off.

Hint: The focus has to be on the customer unless you are an expert.

Why is not knowing what business you are in a fatal flaw? It is like leaving your house to take a trip and not knowing where you are going. Who needs directions, a map, or GPS? The lack of focus of what you do and for whom you do it for places you in the "takes all comers" category. You are then on the race to the bottom as a "commodity" provider and not a service provider. Does that make sense?

2) Not Knowing Who Your Target Audience Is and What Their Needs Are.

I saw a post the other day on a Private Investigator listserve. The PI asked, How do you market?

The answers were varied and well-meaning, but no one bothered to ask him what business he was in or who is in his target-market, let alone ask what their needs were. It was like they were telling him to hunt bears with a fishing pole or to shoot Tuna in the ocean. Once I figured out that he did matrimonial surveillance, I knew he had two target markets, and they had very different needs. The broader and lower-paying market were regular folks that needed to know if when their spouse was cheating on them. The smaller audience, but better-paying clients, were divorce attorneys who regularly needed specific evidence that they could present in court. More was at stake at that phase of the litigation process. This PI was not an expert Surveillance specialist and could not command a premium for his work product and therefore had to be price sensitive. I explained to him that regular folks go on the internet for his services. They are in the ocean, and his website had to be the attractive lure in the water. What he said on his website and what content he offered for free was the bait. Internet marketers call it clickbait. His sales pitch had to be first and foremost about meeting their needs. That is how he had to reel them in. This is called inbound marketing, and its like fishing in the ocean.

Marketing to attorneys is outbound marketing, and that is like hunting. You go out to where the lawyers drink and play. You show up at their Bar Association meetings, and you use a rifle and not a shotgun. You are aiming at one lawyer at a time. (just an analogy)

Hint- Lawyers 'don't go on the internet when they are looking for a Private Investigator, they call another lawyer that they know, like and trust for a referral.

The needs and wants of regular people and their attorneys are very different. A DVD of Mrs. Jones, who has a thing going on, may help Mr. Jones decide to move forward with a divorce, but the Disc might be just an expensive drink coaster for his attorney.

Take a moment to type in your browser (your State or Province) + Private Investigator. The first sites that will pop up are from firms that are paying for first-page placement and may not even be licensed to work in

your locale. Then come the organic websites that rank high due to great keywords and SEO (search engine optimization) Sadly, the content of most of the sites are all about the PI and not about their 'customer's needs. Also, the services are not focused at all and cross all the business verticals. Lastly, there is no call to action (CTA). There is no reason for the prospect to take the next step in hiring them.

If by some miracle, the prospect calls the PI, they may get a generic answering message where the PI 'doesn't even identify themselves or worse. They get a full voice mailbox. For several years, I assisted the National Association of Legal Investigators, of which I was a Regional Director in calling Private Investigators who appeared to be delinquent on their dues. I would get them answering the phone with, "'Who's this?" or "Yeah?" or "This is Jablotnick." I asked myself if I would want to spend my hard-earned money with them. They may be great investigators, but the first impression is a lasting one.

*Write out a paragraph of who your target audience is, whether your a fishing (inbound) or hunting (outbound) and decide what steps you are going to take to match what you do best with what their need. 'It's a start.

3) Not Marketing With a Measurable Plan

"I rely on word of mouth." is the number one answer in this game of the Family Feud. I think to myself. "Oh, you rely on the kindness of others. 'It's passive, and there is no way to measure how well 'it's working."

I also ask others, "In an average week, how many hours do you spend marketing?" The number one answer is, "Well, I am too busy working to do any marketing."

The last question that I ask which pretty much tells me that there is no marketing going on is: "What percentage of your expense dollars is related directly to sales and marketing." Need I bore you with the obvious answer?

The reality is this. The PI gets a call or an email; they do a limited needs analysis, fail to command a premium for their time or effort, takes the job, and doesn't do any up-sell. Rinse and repeat. Some weeks they are busier

than a one-legged individual in an ass-kicking contest and other weeks, they hear the birdies chirp and wonder when, if ever, the next case will come in. Desperation sets in, and they take on cases they might not otherwise. They take cases further away from their regular territory (Just this once, they say), and lastly, they take cases where it costs them money in the form of their time that they could have been using to market high-pay fast-pay clients. Because there is no plan, there is nothing to measure. Why do some websites convert better than others? What are they doing to attract a regular stream of exciting jobs at a premium? The big boys are only as good as their lowest-paid front-line employees. Indeed, they 'don't have the years of experience and know-how you have? The secret is in their marketing and keeping promises. MacDonalds will up-sell fries to go with that shake, but you are a gourmet chef and have empty tables every night. What is the difference? Hungry people know that there is a MacDonalds nearby and what they can expect. They will drive by your restaurant to get there. They need to know that you can give them a great meal experience, not just a happy meal.

Building a replicable and scalable marketing plan is the key to your success. Think of the word of mouth referral that comes from your excellent work as a bonus, not as your sole business acquisition strategy.

4) Doing the urgent tasks but not the important ones

Shoot for 10% of your time to be devoted to marketing. Carve out this time.

Try to do your marketing when your energy is the best. 'It's easy to push it off to the next day when you are tired, then the next day and the next day and you get the picture.

Overwhelm is a constant bane of marketing. Just reshuffle the deck and deal a fresh hand. 'Don't feel like you have to make up for a week or months worth of missed opportunities.

Plan precisely what you are going to do for that finite period. The problem, many times, is that there is no plan. It is better to work on a planned hour of marketing than to stare at your desktop and think you have to do something for 8 hours that day.

Initially, spend that time to develop your strategy following the first three points above, then break them down into tasks.

Put them into your calendar and see how it works.

Don't have an appointment calendar? Buy one. Its the best business tool you can have. The act of making an appointment with yourself to market is powerful, and checking that box is very satisfying. 'It's like a dopamine hit.

Give your tasks time to bear fruit, tweak your call scripts or your marketing copy with a focus on your target audiences; most importantly, on their needs.

Keep score. Use a simple spreadsheet to track what you do. For example, how many calls you make or contact you receive? How many you converted to sales? What marketing stream they came from? What was the final amount of the deal?

Don't use the success excuse to stop marketing. Just because your marketing efforts are paying off and you are getting more work in the door, strive on getting better-paying clients that require less physical hours to meet their needs. You will find that growth has its own challenges when you get past survival mode.

The good news is that you 'don't have to do this alone. A coach will help make the marketing medicine go down smoother. I have used coaches myself for years and have found the investment of time and money to be worth every penny. Just one marketing activity, done one hour a week, saved my business nearly twenty years ago. Back then, I was still learning how to be a business person that provided investigative services. I have scaled and replicated that one method over the years, and it is still my number one marketing tool today.

Not sure if a coach is right for you? Go to www.ThePICoach.com and schedule a free 30-minute call to do a needs analysis. Part of the homework for that call has already been done above, and you are almost there.

How can I help you not only survive but thrive?

Avoid glaring mistakes and start walking in a positive direction.

*The author is a former Police Officer, Insurance Fraud Investigator and for the last 22 years has run a successful Private Investigations business. Many of his cases made the headlines of the Philadelphia Inquirer and the New Haven Register.

He has written numerous articles for PI Magazine and other publications and has created the DVD: The Ultimate Guide to Taking Statements. He is a frequent guest blogger and webinar presenter on Investigative Interviewing.

John has sat on the boards of the both the National Association of Legal Investigators and the CT Assoc. of Licensed Private Investigators. He is a Certified Legal Investigator and a Certified Fraud Examiner. Through the years, He told his stories about his latest cases over coffee, at parties, or dinner engagements. Asked repeatedly to write them down, he finally did with: *Mugshots: My Favorite Detective Stories* which can be found in e-Book on most platforms and in print through Amazon and IngramSpark. A free e-book copy is yours for downloading at www.johnhoda.com

His Podcast, My Favorite Detective Stories, is heard in 47 countries. You might like the podcast about investigators for investigators hosted by an investigator. Promo Video https://youtu.be/xA-qlfn6_qw

A crime thriller with a mystery twist: *Odessa on the Delaware* was released in the Winter of 2018 introducing FBI Agent Marsha 'O'Shea.

Mr. Hoda has been a lifetime athlete, playing club soccer and semi-professional football, running marathons and bicycling long distance.