

# Reality Sells



# **Reality Sells**

## **How to Bring Customers Back Again and Again by Marketing Your Genuine Story**

Written by  
**Andrew Corbus**  
and  
**Bill Guertin**

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For more information and the latest on *Reality Sells*, visit:  
[www.realitysells.com](http://www.realitysells.com).

# Foreword

by  
Ivan Burnell

At last, a book presenting and promoting the concept of honesty in marketing and selling. This closely held secret to wealth has finally been revealed! *Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.* It's a lesson I discovered in my own career many years ago.

Due to a set of life circumstances, I was without a job, stone broke and owing tens of thousands of dollars to various merchants. That is when I was offered a job as a salesman, selling life insurance, and I would be paid while I was learning the trade. The agency took me on, trained me, helped me get my license and sent me out in the field to work using the formula, words and technique that they taught me.

I worked hard and long, studying different products, trying different markets, going to motivational seminars, and always wanting to be a better agent. Yet I was barely making a living, and certainly not paying back my debts. Friends told me to leave my small hometown in the hills of New Hampshire to a big city where the high rollers and successful insurance agents were, but I did not want to leave the area.

Then one day, after a particularly unsuccessful sales appointment, I was ready to quit because I could no longer continue to put

up with the frustration and tension of trying to get people to buy life insurance. That is when I had my awakening. I had been trying to manipulate people into buying something that they did not necessarily want to buy and I did not feel comfortable doing it.

From that point on, I changed my approach and became real, and made my sales efforts all about the customer. Within two years I became the top agent in my company, I was able to pay off all my debts, and was offered a management position, all while staying in the small town that I loved. By using the techniques that you're about to read, I discovered what you're about to discover for yourself: "Reality Sells." It really does!

If you follow the precepts of this book, you cannot fail to become a success, whatever your product, wherever you are.

Ivan Burnell, Author

*"Power of Positive Doing", "Say Yes to Life", "Road to a Happier Marriage."*

# Acknowledgements

A project like this cannot be realized without the profound influence of others. We are grateful for all the great mentors we have each had throughout the years. As we worked through our ideas, and mined our own knowledge and experiences, a number of business and life lessons were incorporated into our writing. We recognize the wisdom of previous employers, business partners, teachers, coaches and mentors from weeks, years, and even decades ago. We have both been blessed with having great examples in life.

We are particularly grateful to the friends and mentors in the speaking and training industry who have been very gracious with their time and knowledge. In very few places have we found a greater example of mentorship.

Thank you to our families and wives, Sherri and Jessica for your support, encouragement and understanding; we truly couldn't have done this without you.

We dedicate this book to all who give freely of themselves for the benefit of others by serving as teachers, coaches, and mentors.

# Introduction

**Andrew Corbus** As a small-business owner, I was given a thoughtful holiday gift by Glendal Kilbride, my radio-advertising sales rep. It was a book titled *The Wizard of Ads* by Roy H. Williams. Knowing my personality, she believed that I would be able to identify with it.

I was intrigued by Roy's book, which had much to say about advertising and how to improve its effectiveness. Because of his insight, I began to look for new ways to deepen my radio effectiveness. Glendal put me in touch with Bill Guertin, the station's sales director, to work out some of my ideas.

Bill and I began to meet on a regular basis, sharing marketing ideas and stories. The result of these meetings, over the course of a number of years, is the information contained in this book.

We wrote it because we both realized how difficult it was to come up with real advertising copy that wasn't like everything else. We also felt as though business owners spent little or no time educating staff members about advertising, and we couldn't believe how much money was spent on advertising that wasn't supported with customer-service training.

It's been a fun ride. Thanks, Glendal, for giving me the book; and thank you, Roy, for giving us something to meet about in the first place.

**Bill Guertin** It has always been a goal of mine to write a book, but I've held off for several years because I wanted to be sure to write something others would consider worthy of reading. I'm glad I waited until now.

*Reality Sells* is the culmination of many thoughts, observations, and real-life trial and error that Andy and I have shared in the business and advertising world. We believe there's not another business book like it.

You'll see several sidebars throughout the text that we have created to give you our own personal revelations that are relevant to the topics being discussed. You'll see my "800-Pound Insights," which are my experiences, thoughts, and comments, along with Andrew's "Authenticity Points," his personal stories and thoughts that add to the subject matter.

One other special feature throughout the book is a group of sections called "Reality Check." These are valuable opportunities to reflect, study, and work on your particular business situation. In my mind, the ultimate compliment to a book is to have someone say, "Your work really made me think." We believe you'll find several of those moments inside.

Thank you for the privilege you've given us to make a potential impact in your business life. We think you'll enjoy it.

# CHAPTER 1

## The Start of the Revolution

People want to be real. Customers want real service. Businesses are trying to be real.

But why?

Where is all this reality coming from?

It all started innocently enough.

It was 1996, and Charlie Parsons and Bob Geldof were toying with a new television concept. It was a stretch: Put sixteen people on a deserted-island location, divide them into survival teams, have them compete in several sports-like challenges, and vote one person off the island at a time. Eventually the two teams would merge, and individuals would then compete against each other, with one person winning a large grand prize.

The idea was loosely based on the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, and the resulting concept was a weekly series they named *Expedition Robinson*—an unscripted, dramatic production with cameras stuck everywhere on the island, and amateurs as the “stars.” Parsons and Geldof struck a deal with the Swedish public-television station SVT, and filming began in the summer of 1997.

No one could have predicted what would happen next.

When *Expedition Robinson* first aired, the Swedish media were extremely critical of the show, calling it “crap television” and

“humiliating.” It stirred a national debate in Sweden about what constituted moral and ethical television. As debate about the program raged on, viewership climbed each week. The more that people talked about it, the more people who watched it. The country was at once fascinated and outraged by this new form of entertainment.

After the program had aired for only a few weeks, a tragedy almost forced the show off the air; the very first person who was voted off the island was found dead in his own apartment, an apparent suicide. The family of the young man claimed that the public’s rejection of him led to his decision to take his own life. That fact was never proven, but the incident fanned the flames of controversy even more, and ratings continued to climb.

Ultimately, 33-year-old Martin Melen was crowned the first-ever reality-show champion in the fall of 1997. *Expedition Robinson* would go on for several more seasons, and became the most-watched television program in Swedish history in its fourth year.

The revolution had begun.

### **Why Reality Is In**

Like it or not, reality television has become the new norm of pop culture. *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, MTV’s *The Real World*, *Fear Factor*, *American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *The Apprentice*, *The Biggest Loser*, *The Contender*, and dozens of other similar programs have become ratings superstars, each one a derivative of the original concept. The objective is eerily similar: Get people to do things on camera that are unscripted, unpredictable, and that eventually show their true colors.

We got a glimpse of this high-stakes reality in 1990, when *America’s Funniest Home Videos* gave people an opportunity to expose their own dubious home-video tapings for a cool \$10,000 grand prize. High ratings for the show and its popular host, sitcom star Bob Saget, got the network executives’ wheels turning.

Fast-forward to today's reality TV landscape. Million-dollar cash prizes can now make winners both rich and famous. It's great to be on TV, but now it's about big money and big fame. With that much at stake, who *doesn't* want to be a millionaire?

The amazing part to most of us is the fact that these contestants are willing to expose themselves—faults and all—to all of America and the world. The chance to be the talk of the nation is the motivation behind shows like *Wife Swap* and *The Nanny*. Yes, they're paid to be a part of the program, but the real payoff for them is being on national TV.

Whether it's individuals vying for a million-dollar prize, or a Christian mom surviving a week with an atheist family, there is a fascination for the unvarnished truth that is capturing the interest of entertainment consumers worldwide. If you keep the camera on long enough, you eventually find out what these people are really like...and that's what the world wants to know.

**It's now true in business as well.** Customers also want to know what *you're* really like.

Consumers are sick to death of being lied to, sold to, and manipulated. They now want to know the true you. They want the authentic story, and they're much wiser to the tricks and empty promises of most of the advertising that's produced. In fact, they're finding more and more ways to get the inside scoop about your business without your help. Behind your back. In ways that you have absolutely no control over. And consumers are in love with these new means of communication.

### **Blogs, IM, and Texting: Today's New Billboards**

It used to be that you had more control of the messages that customers saw and heard about you. Not anymore. There are now a number of ways to get the real scoop on whose business is hot and whose is not.

Want to know what young people are thinking these days? Go to [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com), [www.xanga.com](http://www.xanga.com), or any of the other personal blogs available for everyone to see.

Blogging and instant messaging (IM) has all but replaced face-to-face conversation in many circles, spawning a new language of shortcut words and phrases (LOL, BRB, ROTF, etc.). And when these technology users are not at their computers, they're on cell phones texting messages back and forth.

What do these bloggers, IM'ers, and texters talk about? Anything and everything. Their businesses, their relationships, their feelings, their emotions, and their opinions on every detail of their lives. This is *their* voice, and they want to be heard. It's word of mouth to the millionth power. The Website [www.chuetrain.com](http://www.chuetrain.com) puts it this way:

“Networked markets are beginning to self-organize faster than the companies that have traditionally served them. Thanks to the Web, markets are becoming better informed, smarter, and more demanding of qualities missing from most business organizations.”

This is the new landscape of personal opinion, where products are made or broken, where trends can be praised or laid to waste, and where movies are hailed or trashed before they even make it to their opening weekend. Those who read these opinions are more willing to believe their peers than any newspaper ad, because those who write such comments aren't being paid to do so. The power has shifted to the people, and the people have more ways to share their opinions with the masses.

Gone are the days where all you needed to do was advertise a few polished words and slick sentences, and people would flock to your door in droves. Your reputation—and your ultimate success—is now literally in the hands of those you serve.

So who can win in a business atmosphere that you can't control?

*You* can.

If you know exactly who you are, deliver a clear, honest business message, and back up that message by providing the products or services you offer in the way in which you promised, you can win. Put more succinctly, it's "know thyself, promote thyself honestly, and do as thou sayeth every time."

This is the new language of business success, and its name is Authenticity.



### **800-Pound Insight**

My wife and I were on a weekend trip to Clearwater Beach, Florida, where we met a vendor of handmade jewelry at a craft fair. Sherri had never had an ankle bracelet, and she fell in love with one of the vendor's unique silver-beaded creations.

"How much?" I asked, fearing the worst.

Without hesitating, he shot out a price that I didn't think was too bad. "You'll see dozens of jewelry vendors here on the pier," he said, "but there's no one who'll sell you this kind of quality for that kind of price. I guarantee everything I sell for life. If you don't like it after you've worn it for a year, send it back, and I'll give you every penny back. If you love it and if it ever breaks, I'll send you a brand-new one for free."

This was too good to be true, I thought to myself. "How will we find you if we need you?"

He pulled out his card, which I will never forget.

The business card of Robert Jay Polukoff (pronounced Paula-Cough) is packed with information in small black letters on a plain-white card, but it is fabulous information. In big, bold letters across the middle, it reads:

**100% SATISFACTION MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

In smaller letters, he then has his name (with the correct pronunciation) and his title: “Lapidary Genius Extraordinaire and Master Craftsman.”

In the top-left corner, his card reads: “If you like them now, you will love them ten minutes from now—they always look new.” (By the way, he was right.)

In the top right: “Real jewelry that’s real treasure for less money than real trash.” (He was right on that too. I passed the other vendors and didn’t see half the quality he had, and all of them were substantially more expensive.)

The bottom right has his contact information along with the phrase: “Planned my work, working my plan.” (Don’t you want to do business with someone who has a plan? I do.)

The bottom left is my favorite part: “Coolest human to do business with. High-quality treasure at low price. Fix it for free for a lifetime. Built to last a lifetime the first time.”

I have yet to take him up on his offer, because several years later, it’s still Sherri’s favorite piece of jewelry. I’ve seen and heard all those superlatives before, but I have never seen someone back them up like Robert Jay Polukoff. He is as authentic as they come.

Something as simple as a business card can create a lasting impression. I was so impressed with the card and the service that I have kept it for reference for several years. Robert chose to create a long-lasting calling card that would build confidence and remind people of the details of their experience. I look forward to doing business with Robert again, and I’m sure some of you do as well.



**Free Goodie**

Want to contact Robert? For his contact information go to the Goodie Box at [www.realitysells.com](http://www.realitysells.com) and enter the word **ROBERT** in the box. Note: You will need to register if you are a first time user.

## **Authenticity: What Customers Want**

Ever done business with a company that advertised “fast, friendly service,” and it wasn’t fast, friendly, OR service?

As consumers, all we want is for somebody to do what they say they’re going to do. If a dry cleaner advertises same-day shirts to be done by 4:00 p.m., we expect them to be true to their word. If a realtor says she can get you the best price for your home and will advertise it every week, anything less is a disappointment.

That’s called being Authentic.

The language of reality in business is Authenticity. Not just saying it, but living it out.

**In business, we believe Authenticity occurs when the customer receives the same or better experience that was promised in the company’s advertising, its word-of-mouth, or any other means of communication.**

Anything less than the promised experience, whether promised by advertising, marketing, or word of mouth, is the business equivalent of the kiss of death. The net result of an Authentic experience, however, is the bliss that occurs when a consumer’s expectations are met or exceeded, which can lead to repeat business, positive word of mouth, and explosive growth.

It would be simple if there were a list of all the things that people regularly wanted from those with whom they do business, but not everyone has the same measuring stick.

## **Here Comes the Judge . . . and It’s Not You**

From the moment someone hears about you, decides to seek you out, and finally makes the effort to call or visit you, a set of expectations are formed about the experience. How the expectations are

met becomes the basis for that customer's opinion, and how he will speak about your business in the future. Authenticity is ultimately judged by the consumer. And even though service levels are declining in nearly every major category, the customers of today are becoming more demanding than ever.

They can see through the thin veils of hype and exaggeration. They've heard and seen it all before. The customer is looking for real, honest products and services that live up to the promises made about them.

*Reality Sells* is both a primer and a road map for you to begin to create Authenticity in your business or workplace. It combines advertising and training to create an authentic environment in which sales and service levels can increase.

The concepts are based on the premise that you can improve your Authenticity level by carefully (and truthfully!) creating an improved advertising message, and then training your staff on how to deliver what the new message promises. We call this training concept "Selling the Inside," and it's clearly different than simply teaching your employees to smile and say "thank you." The better your staff understands the promises you have made in your advertising, the more likely they can meet or exceed the expectations of your customers.