

Using the Pillar System to Start or Refine a Business or Project

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Author's Note: This report is designed as a supplement for those who've read the [Index Card Business Plan](#) or who are familiar with the Pillar System and CAP strategies. I wanted to get this out as quick as possible after the release of the book. Consequently, it has not been edited for grammar etc... so my apologies in advance.

Turning Pillars into a Process

A little while back, one of my clients asked me to summarize the process that generated him seven figures during the previous two years. He wanted to share it with some of his clients. So, I outlined it on my whiteboard and read it to him over the phone. I quickly realized the steps I outlined could help sales pros, business leaders, entrepreneurs, marketers, non-profit executives and virtually anyone who needed a simple framework to hit a goal. Furthermore, they could use it to start a new business or project, or just refine an existing one. This was the catalyst for incorporating the Pillar System into a six-step process to design or streamline a business.

Although I'd used each of the six steps for myself and others, I wanted to test the full process. To do this, I applied it to a solo project in a field I'd never worked in. With the help of a PG partner, I was able to surpass the six-figure profit mark in just over nine months of part-time work! It was now time to share the process with more people.

How to Use the Six Steps

When it comes to the principles of human success, very little has changed. Consider one of my favorite books, *The Success System That Never Fails* by W. Clement Stone. It was first published in 1962 and it's as relevant today as it was more than half-a-century ago. In that spirit, you won't find anything

groundbreaking about the individual steps. But as a whole, they provide an effective roadmap to start or streamline your business or project.

Experts have dedicated entire books, seminars, and websites to help you improve at each step. But before diving into these resources, you should read through the entire process to understand how the steps work together.

The six-step process isn't for one-time use. Instead, you should use it like a productivity comb to run through your business or project every so often. It will clean out the unproductive dirt that's crept in and get you back on track.

What Not to Skip

If you're not in sales or marketing, you might consider skipping steps two, three and four where we identify ideal clients, craft your message, and choose delivery channels. However, I'll warn you to be careful about concluding that you aren't in sales and marketing even if you don't participate directly. If you have a great deal invested in your project, business or organization, there is a good chance you are in sales and marketing.

If you work with an established organization, you may be tempted to skip steps two, three and four because they've already been done for you. Don't skip them. My experience with established companies and organizations is that most of what they do is because that's the way it's always been done. Consequently, a fresh, objective look at these steps often reveal more effective tools and strategies.

Six Steps to Design or Streamline Your Business

Establish Directional and Short Term Goals



Identify Your Ideal Client



Craft an Effective Message



Determine the Best Delivery Channel(s)



Identify Your Pillars



Build a Custom Accountability Program

1) Establish Directional and Short-Term Goals

Outlined in The Index Card Business Plan

2) Identify Your Ideal Client

Although a lot has been written about identifying your ideal client, few people engage in this exercise as thoroughly as they should. You must get specific — and just when you think you're done — get more specific. Having a vague ideal client profile will lead to ineffective messaging, wasted marketing resources, and a lot of doubt about what you're doing.

A few years ago, I worked on a TV commercial for a well-known brand of financial services. We worked through the initial ideal client profile for the campaign and initially decided that the ideal client was:

- Someone who would qualify financially for their product.
- Someone with a strong desire to save money.
- Someone who trusts national brands more than local professionals.
- Someone in one of the age demographics that trusts TV ads.

However, upon further examination, we realized this profile also matched the profile of their competition. Consequently, we still didn't have an ideal client profile. After further thought we added one more characteristic.

- Someone who incorrectly assumed they weren't financially qualified.

By taking the process to the end, we crafted a message that targeted viewers who were ignoring the competitor's message because they didn't think it applied to them. The point of this example is that most people who work on ideal client profiles stop way too short.

Data Driven Ideal Client Profiles

When available, you should always use data on your current clients to help determine your ideal client. Let me give you an example based on my experience with financial advisors. If you ask financial advisors to profile their ideal client, most will offer a general description, like “Somebody with long-term thinking and at least \$300,000 of investable assets”. Although these people would make good clients, the profile is too generic to target effectively.

Smart advisors look for a niche, but often make a critical mistake. They try to pick a niche instead of letting their current client data identify the right niche. They’re unwittingly doing this for two reasons. First, they instinctively believe that they’d do well prospecting and working with a certain niche. Second, they think they know the profile of their top clients. My direct and indirect work with advisors suggests they’re overestimating the accuracy of their intuitiveness.

My solution is straightforward. I show them how to let data on their top clients show them who they are already good at attracting and retaining. We look for occupational, social, and demographic patterns in the data. Additionally, we look at how these top clients were acquired. This relatively simple exercise reveals major differences between who they assumed was their ideal client and who actually was.

3) Craft an Effective Message

If there’s any shortcoming I see in most of my partners and clients, it’s copywriting (crafting words to persuade action) and effective messaging. More than any time in history, your potential and existing customers are bombarded with messages vying for their limited attention. This means customers can only afford to pay attention to things that are immediately relevant to them. Think of all the ads you hear that are interesting, but you never act on them.

The modern day message bombardment has exponentially increased the value of quickly and clearly articulating an effective message to the right audience (ideal client). It's why great copywriters charge thousands of dollars a day and never hurt for business. Not having a clear and effective message at every point along the customer contact continuum is a weakness that the best sales person or largest marketing campaign will have difficulty overcoming. This includes email, web pages, advertisements and your verbal communication.

A while back, I wrote what I now consider to be two sloppy emails on behalf of a client whose product we were trying to license to a company. My contact at the company quickly replied to the emails stating that she didn't "get it". Luckily, she believes in my recommendations enough that instead of just moving on, she suggested I have the client cut a very simple 30-second video demonstrating the prototype. And the short video resulted in a licensing agreement. And I was reminded of the danger of not taking the time to craft a simple, clear and effective message.

There are countless books, courses, and professionals dedicated to effective copywriting and messaging. I summarized a few of the basics below, but it would be well worth your time to devote part of your work week to studying the science of effective messaging.

Focus on Being Effective, Not Good

You will notice the title of this section contains "effective message", instead of "good message". This isn't by accident. A lot of professionals and companies judge their marketing materials on how "good" they are. Even in the branding world where the goal is to associate your product with a certain feeling, millions of dollars are wasted. How many funny or novel commercials have you seen, but couldn't remember the exact brand it was endorsing? If you can only describe it as a "beer commercial" is it effective?

You want things to look great and appear professional, but not at the expense of keeping your ideal clients from taking action. Effective messages get responses

from the right people...period. If a message doesn't get results, regardless of how creative or cool you and others think it's, change it!

Focus on Benefits – Not Features

On the front end, people don't care how much money you've spent to develop a product, the cutting edge material involved, or that your proprietary manufacturing process was developed in Norway. They only care that it can solve their problem or fulfill a need or a want.

The classic example of focusing on benefits, not features, is when Apple had to educate the entire nation on their new, high-tech portable music device called the Ipod. They cut through all sorts of jargon, features, and technology when Steve Jobs stated, "This little device holds a thousand songs, and it goes right in my pocket."

Another example often discussed by the renowned marketer Dan Kennedy (GKIC.com) is Domino's Pizza. In their early years of domination, Domino's Pizza didn't promote or detail the quality of their ingredients, their great taste, or their commitment to customers. Instead, they built an empire with, "Fresh Hot Pizza Delivered in 30 Minutes or Less" because this is what their ideal customers cared about. They were hungry and they didn't want to cook or leave the house.

Less is More

It takes more time and effort to craft a short, effective message than a long one, but your ability to be concise will pay off. One of the easiest ways to eliminate unnecessary words, space, and sentences is to pretend you're the reader or person listening and ask "so what?" If you don't have a good answer, get rid of it. The message is about them, not you.

Certainly there are situations where a marketing message doesn't need to be short. In fact, I was lucky enough to spend a few days with a copywriter who has

sold over \$5 million dollars of a single e-book based on a long online sales letter. But for most people reading this, they will require a short and effective message.

Continue the Conversation in Your Prospect's Head

The problem with “interruption” marketing is that it requires two steps. The first step is to interrupt the reader’s current thinking to make them aware of a problem they didn’t know they had or aren’t currently thinking about. The second step is to offer your solution. Interruption marketing has proven to be effective, it just requires more work.

The more effective way to get a prospect’s attention is to continue a conversation that’s already in their head. A multi-billion dollar industry was created around the common internal conversation of, “I need to find a way to lose weight”.

Present Solutions in your Prospect's Language

Always present a solution to your prospect’s problem as they perceive it, not you. For example, the solution to many people’s problem is the Pillar System found my book. It does this by bringing clarity about the specific critical activities that will have the biggest impact in their project or business. However, using the language in the previous sentence would be ineffective because that isn’t how most people perceive their existing problems. Instead, they think in terms like “Stuck”, “Unorganized”, “Overwhelmed”, “Not Focused”, “Busy Putting Out Fires”, “Not Enough Time”, etc. Consequently, I use this type of language when marketing my services. The word pillar rarely comes up.

Write for Your Ideal Client

“Walk left side, safe. Walk right side, safe. Walk middle, sooner or later get squish just like grape.” Mr. Miyagi

If you craft a message to avoid being challenged or to make sure everybody likes you, you'll probably accomplish your goal. The problem is you won't generate any response from the right type of prospects. It's better to have a smaller group of people love what you say than have most of them like what you say... even if this means there is a group that completely disagrees.

If you own a golf course, it would be very difficult to attract both the affluent crowd that covets exclusivity and uniqueness without turning off the cost-conscious crowd that wants to stretch their budget... and vice versa.

If your goal is to have golfers pay upfront for the year, you can sell “memberships” to people by marketing the exclusiveness and access members receive. You could also sell the same thing to the cost-conscious golfer by simply calling it “unlimited golf” and explaining how you save money over the year if you play a certain amount of golf. It's the same product, marketed to very different audiences. In the case of the “membership”, you'll turn off the cost-conscious golfer who doesn't like paying for frills. In the case of “unlimited golf”, you'll turn off those that want exclusiveness and status.

Give Real Credibility, Not Resume Credibility

When possible, you should initially focus on real credibility that prospects care about, not resume credibility. When prospecting for clients, don't focus on your degrees, education, businesses you've been a part of, or how long you've been doing this or that. Instead, your initial email or marketing piece should focus on specific results your clients or customers have realized. The more specific, the better. *“Realtors using my ABC technique average 2-3 additional listings in their first month of implementation”*

Test, Test, and Test

No matter how many rules you follow and how much you like your marketing message and materials, the customer response is the only true measure. A product that I recently helped bring to market was ordered in large numbers by some of the biggest retailers in the world... its success looked inevitable! However, I just received word that my first royalty check won't break the bank and they're thinking about yanking it all together. It looks like the customer has spoken.

In the case of this product, a lot of time and money was spent to find out how customers felt, and it still didn't end well. For most businesses and products, however, the testing can be done more quickly. In any marketing piece, whether it's a website, an email, an ad, or even a person to person pitch you must do a lot of testing and refining before putting significant resources behind it. The truth is that the greatest product or service in the world rarely sells itself on the first try.

4) Determine the Best Delivery Channels

If you make it to step 4, I can tell you with full conviction that you're ahead of 90% of your peers who've never taken the time to truly determine their ideal client and craft an effective message. You should be brimming with confidence now that if you get your message in front of enough ideal clients that the sales or results you seek will come. If you don't feel this way, go back to steps two and three because the rest of the steps won't matter.

The most effective channels to deliver your message will depend on your product, service, audience, budget, skill set and many other factors. In many cases, you'll have different delivery channels for different products, services or target audience. The ideal situation, when resources permit, is to test multiple channels for a specific product or service and then double down on the one that works best. All others should be eliminated until you've mastered the first and have the resources to attack additional channels with the same resources.

You should NEVER assume the best way to do things is the way they've always been done or the way your company is currently doing them. I once tested TV, radio, and print ads for a client that paid good money to use a celebrity endorser. It seemed like leading with the celebrity endorsement was the right way to go. It turned out that an outbound robo call out produced all of the other channels combined... and cost much less! I experienced this personally when I spent around \$4,000 on a social media marketing campaign that generated \$6,000 in revenue for one of my projects. During the same time frame, I crafted, tested, and sent a cold email that generated \$70,000 in revenue... and they say cold calling/emailing is dead!

Note: If your product or service has a multi-step and/or long sales cycle, this would be the place to review or design your lead nurturing system. Examples include email lists, newsletter subscriptions, follow up sequences etc.

5) Identify Your Pillars

Once you're clear on your goals, messaging, targets, and distribution channel, you can begin the process of identifying your pillars so that your weekly strategy lines up with everything. If you're revamping or reviewing an existing business, you don't have to halt your work and scrap your existing pillars right away. Instead, you can add a pillar that sets aside time to work on steps 1-4. Once these steps are completed, you can identify your new set of pillars. The process of identifying your pillars is described in detail in [The Index Card Business Plan](#).

6) Build a Custom Accountability Program

Once your pillars are in place, you should immediately start the exercise of developing your Custom Accountability Program as outlined in [The Index Card Business Plan](#).

Summary

- **The Pillar System can be used as part of a six-step process to design a business, design a project within a business, or refine a business at any point to maximize results.**
- **The six-step process isn't for one-time use. It should be used like a productivity comb that's run through your business or project periodically. It will clean out the unproductive dirt that's crept in and get you back on track.**
- **The six steps are**
 - **Establish Directional and Short-Term Goals**
 - **Identify Your Ideal Client**
 - **Craft an Effective Message**
 - **Determine the Best Delivery Channel(s)**
 - **Identify Your Pillars**
 - **Build a Custom Accountability Program**