

With continued woes in the housing market, slowing economic growth and a weakening dollar, the US economy is hitting hard times and long-term trends don't look good.

Whether you're planning a new business, just launched one, or have been running it for a while, it's critical to have the right tools in your toolkit to ensure you survive ongoing business challenges as well as economic factors that compound the everyday obstacles of growing a business...

# 10 Items You Should Have In Your Toolkit

...Just In Case The Economy Tanks And You Want To Avoid Going Down With It!

Beth Goldstein



**GPS System** before you begin your business journey so you end up close to where you intended and don't get distracted by detours and pit stops along the way. Your roadmap should include not just your destination but all the reasons why you started the journey to keep you going during the inevitable days when the road twists unexpectedly and your business outlook appears murkier than anticipated.

**Noise Cancelling Headphones** to make sure you're actively listening to customers and are not distracted by outside noise. We must be wary of preconceived notions we all possess telling us what we assume our customers need and want because these oftentimes prevent us from really hearing their needs. Remember, headphones are for listening-not talking and that's a critical skill business owners need to possess to identify what their customers need and expect from them.

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**Cell Phone** to ensure you are constantly communicating with customers, partners, and mentors throughout the trip. You can never have too strong a communication loop between you and those individuals who support your business. You must be within easy reach and be prepared to respond. Studies show it can cost up to 5 times the amount of money to bring in new customers as it costs to retain good ones. Customers don't expect perfection, but they do expect courtesy and empathy from you when things go well and especially when things go awry.

**Rearview Mirror** will help you see what's behind you. This includes factors out of your control such as economic and industry regulation changes as well as competitors. Remember, competitors include those companies offering similar products/services as well as businesses that offer different products but satisfy your customers' needs and have the potential of 'stealing them' from you.

**Easel and Paintbrush** will help you illustrate your benefits to potential customers, partners, employees and anybody else who needs to clearly understand the value you provide. Customers buy benefits, not features. Often referred to as the "So What Factor" or "What's in it for me?" features simply support the value you provide but are not what matters to prospects. You must be able to paint a strong picture for them addressing these benefits to capture their attention and convert them into customers.

**Rechargeable Batteries** are an important asset to keep in your toolkit. There are going to be plenty of late nights and stressful times when you feel like you're on your last load of energy. The security of knowing you've got the ability to recharge is empowering. Whether your batteries come in the form of a 3 mile jog around the neighbor, a yoga class or grabbing a glass of wine with a friend, make sure you've got "your battery" tucked away and ready to use...just in case you need that extra jumpstart.

**Magnifying Glass** will help you study your customers' demographics, buying patterns and other information you've collected to ensure you're meeting their needs as these evolve with the changing business climate. Do you know what influences their purchasing process, and who is involved in decision-making? What is the one problem that your customers have that you solve for them better than anyone else? Important information about their lifestyle, interests, and values will help you better serve their needs and increase their loyalty-through up and down economic times.

**Measuring Tape** will allow you to continually measure and evaluate your customers' value to your organization. Just as the animals concluded at the end of George Orwell's book *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others," the same might be true about your customers. Not that I am comparing them to animals but some might provide greater value to you than others and you need to know the difference. If you don't continually monitor and measure their Lifetime Value to your

organization you might discover that you have lots of customers who provide a very low value or profit margin to your business and only a handful who truly offer significant economic reward.

**Cash** always comes in handy, regardless of the economic environment. Make sure you know how much money it's going to take to ramp up your business and keep it running, in good times as well as bad. A rainy day fund will support you through unanticipated excursions and ensure you realize your vision and reach your ultimate destination.

**A Few Friendly Ghosts** doesn't refer to Casper but to those intangibles that motivated you to start your business in the first place -- Vision, Passion and a Belief in what you're trying to achieve. While you may not be able to touch or feel them, they are critical parts of your toolkit because without them you may as well close shop and find a job working for somebody else. Running a business is hard work and if you don't feel passionately about it and believe in what you're doing...then it's not going to be worth it in the end.

Author of **The Ultimate Small Business Marketing Toolkit** (McGraw-Hill), **Beth Goldstein** has empowered hundreds of entrepreneurs and companies to launch successful marketing and sales programs. Consultant, national speaker & educator, Beth teaches Entrepreneurial Sales and Marketing at the Boston University School of Management and instructs the InnerCity Entrepreneurs business growth program in Massachusetts. Beth can be reached at [BethG@medge.com](mailto:BethG@medge.com) or by phone at 508.893.0976.

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