

Everything  
you wanted  
to know about  
marketing  
to small  
businesses\*

\*But were afraid to ask

# Big brands don't 'get' small businesses

But we're not saying they aren't trying.  
They're just struggling.

Because marketing to small businesses isn't  
easy – according to the CMO Council,  
90% of brands struggle to connect.



Trouble is, 99% of UK businesses are  
small businesses.

That's a lot of marketing money missing  
the mark. We couldn't stand by and watch  
any longer.



So we hired a film crew, rented a Skoda Octavia  
(Family Car of the Year, we'll have you know\*)  
and embarked on The Trip – an 850-mile  
journey across England, interviewing 18 small  
business owners.



## **Our mission?**

Find out, once and for all, how small  
businesses *really* buy.

## **The result?**

Think Small: an Earnest microsite heaving with  
video interviews, animations, articles, reports –  
all brimming with insight on, well... how small  
businesses *really* buy.



\*So says *What Car?* magazine – and they know motors.



---

Think Small revealed what gets small business owners up in the morning.

What keeps them awake at night.

The struggles of life on the frontline.

It also revealed owners' gripes with Big Brands – best summed up by one particularly disgruntled interviewee:



**“If people talked to you the way that corporates speak to small businesses, you’d punch them in the face.”**

You hold in your hands a small booklet that’s big on insight.

Packed with nuggets of wisdom from Think Small.



---

The kind of stuff that’ll help you strike a better rapport with buyers.

Who knows, maybe even help you sell more.

At the very least, it’ll help you avoid a smack round the chops.

# You’re about to enter the world of small business

**Please tread carefully**

~~Sell~~  
~~sell~~  
~~sell.~~  
Help  
help  
help.

This won't surprise anyone who's ever researched anything online, but buyers feel overwhelmed by how much information is out there.

People have got doubts about the integrity of that information too.

Truth is, for all the ease of online, small business buyers still want to interact with real people, at the right time, to feel reassured they're making the right decisions.

Cue the clued-up sales rep.

Because when it comes to the final buying decision, your rep really can be the clincher.

So arm them with industry insight.



Give them the tools to be a trusted advisor.

And the really big one: tell them to have the buyer's interests at heart, not your brand's.



Because selling to small businesses is about playing the long game.

Even if you don't make that sale today, chances are you'll be on the buyer's radar next time around.



# Jack of all trades, master of all

Small business owners often find themselves dealing with things outside their comfort zone.



Things that pull them away from the day job.

Things they don't enjoy doing.

**“There are a lot of things I’m not an expert in, but you have to be an expert in,” says Diane Hassall, owner of home-run bridal footwear company, Di.**



Diane’s dedicated to her craft – but finds herself spending more and more time having to learn new skills.

**“When I spend time on marketing, I worry I’m not spending enough time on the creative side. I’d love to work with someone who can sell for me. Or help build the website.”**

This is where brands can really help small businesses.



Lighten the load, build the relationship. Trust us, the sales will follow.



**“I just need all the support I can get.”**

**Diane Hassall**  
Owner of Di, bridal footwear company

THE TRIP

**DI**  
BY DIANE HASSALL

A FILM BY EARNEST

# Know what's at stake

(everything)



When you drop the ball as an employee, what's the worst that can happen?

A rubbish performance review.

Pay rise goes out the window.



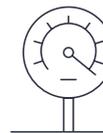
Ego takes a knock.



Which are all unpleasant.

But not lose-everything-you-ever-worked-for unpleasant.

Because that's often what's at stake for small business owners.



So if you want to build stronger connections, appreciate the pressure they're under.

Recognise the obstacles they're up against.

Treat them as people, not potential sales leads.

And don't forget, you're dealing with people who put their whole world on the line, every single day.





**“I lie awake at night,  
knowing I’m not only  
the person that cares  
most about it. But  
I am also the only  
person responsible  
for fixing it.”**

**Andrew Burton**  
Owner of ABC Gym

THE TRIP

• **ABC GYM** •

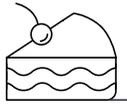
A FILM BY EARNEST

# SUE\*

## some people

\*SUE: Significance-Urgency-Ease

Firmographics are a staple for segmenting B2B audiences.



Trouble is, they lump together small businesses by size, location and industry, and they're blind to the things that make businesses unique.

Things like a business' values, drivers and customer base.

So why not try layering some alternative approaches to get a more complete picture?



Psychographics, for example, take into account buyers' personal and emotional drivers – all the human stuff.

Or there's Earnest's very own Significance-Urgency-Ease (SUE) model that looks at:

- ① **Significance**  
What could a purchase mean to the buyer's business?
- ② **Urgency**  
How time-critical is their purchasing need?
- ③ **Ease**  
How easy is it to research and buy the product?

Sometimes, the way you slice-and-dice your market can make all the difference.

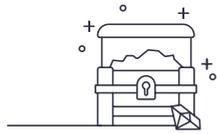
# Instant fail!

## 10 ways to make small businesses hate you

- 1 Talk jargon**  
Hit them with the corporate cobbles. Both barrels. Speak in a way even you don't understand, let alone them.
- 2 Send unsolicited emails**  
The ol' pester-til-they-buy approach. Don't be put off if they don't respond. Email daily for maximum impact.
- 3 Avoid visiting them**  
Never meet in person – you risk building a meaningful rapport. Send a generic mailshot instead. Ideally aimed at large enterprises.
- 4 Show no empathy**  
Ignore the huge pressure small business owners are under. Remind them corporate life is no walk in the park either.
- 5 Focus on selling**  
Don't get bogged down with helping. Or looking out for their best interests. That'll only make them trust and respect you.
- 6 Stalk them online**  
Get your creep on and pop up where they least expect it. Or want it. What else is LinkedIn for?
- 7 Snub networking events**  
Preferably at the last minute. After promising to run a workshop on something really useful.
- 8 Break your promises**  
Become a vital cog in their business. Then fail to deliver and watch their whole operation grind to a halt.
- 9 Limit their buying options**  
Deny them the chance to buy online. It's way too convenient and they could end up feeling satisfied.
- 10 Be really condescending**  
Call them a SMEE. And when they look vexed, take things up a notch. Ask if they'd rather be called a SoHo or SMB.

# Put work into networking

It's hard for Big Brands to win the trust of small business networks. Hard, but not impossible.



It's well worth the effort too, because the rewards can be huge.

The brand that wins the respect of the small business network has the ear of many a small business owner (which nicely elbows other brands out of the conversation).



Offering to help organise a networking event is a good place to start.

Because the reality is, small business owners are just too busy with the day job. So whatever you can do to help will go a long way.

Things like providing a space to meet regularly.

Or running workshops.

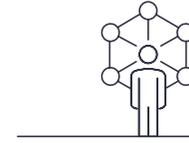


Or inviting other small businesses to help grow the network.

It's that help thing again.

Nothing beats it for humanising your brand and building relationships.

# The pub's as good as anywhere



There's no end of networking opportunities when you work in corporate.

Not so in the small business world.

Which is a shame for the likes of Marlene Reddish, co-owner of wood and metal-working store, Shop Reddish, who recognises the importance of networking.

**“I used to think networking was for people with nothing to do – now I see it's essential.”**



When there wasn't a network in Marlene's area, she set one up herself – in the room above her local pub.



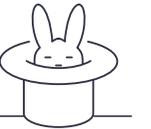
The group pitch in with advice on everything from product packaging to accounting software.

It's about as far removed from corporate schmoozing as you can imagine.



But what it lacks in prosecco and canapés, it makes up for with in-it-together spirit and people's genuine desire to help each other.

# Earnest's not-so- secret formula



People often ask us: what's the trick to marketing to small businesses?

Truth is, there is no trick, just a proven formula.

**Meticulous planning**

+

**Stand-out creative**

+

**Think Small insights**

+

**Earnest's Special Ingredient™**

=

**Big-hitting  
small-business campaigns**

And here's the proof.



## Google gets helpful

We created some educational content to show small businesses that advertising on Google isn't just for the Big Boys.

### The result?

Loads of new customers and a tidy 6:1 ROI.

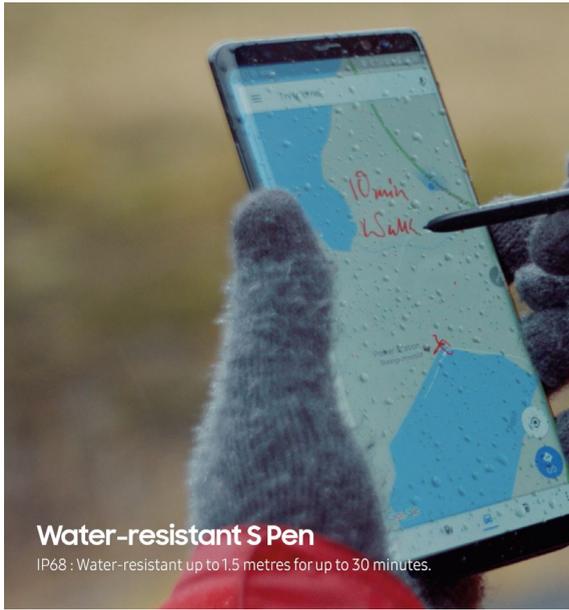


## Gumtree goes analogue

We announced Gumtree and eBay's partnership to independent car dealerships with our playful co-branded toy car direct mail.

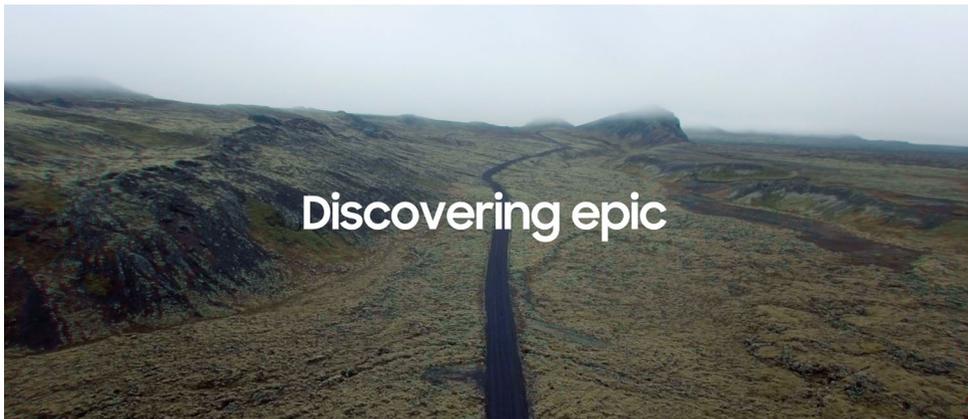
### The result?

A 200% ROI for Gumtree and eBay.  
And an instant collectable for the dealers.  
(Eat your heart out, Matchbox.)



### Water-resistant S Pen

IP68 : Water-resistant up to 1.5 metres for up to 30 minutes.



## Discovering epic

### Samsung tells tales

We filmed small businesses road-testing new Samsung kit to create compelling stories at the point of launch.

#### The result?

Authentic-as-it-gets content that racked up more than 200,000 views and helped spur a 26% hike in category sales.



Meet Fran. She's the budget-conscious one. Whether you're keen to keep costs down or just want to be a bit more economical with your time, Fran makes everything go further.

With larger ink tanks than most, she'll save you money – and the time you spend changing ink cartridges.

She calls them the 'MAXIFY' tanks. We call her an office all-rounder.

Canon MAXIFY printers. What will you call yours?  
[www.canon.co.uk/MAXIFY](http://www.canon.co.uk/MAXIFY)

**MAXIFY**



### Canon shows emotion

We created a bunch of assets that humanised Canon's scanners and printers – writing quirky CVs for them instead of plain old product sheets.

#### The result?

Canon hit 98% of its 12-month category sales target in just four months.

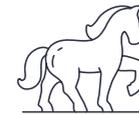
# Rubbish driving, a Skoda named Chyna – and a tonne of respect for small businesses.

James Wood, Head of Earnest Labs, gives the lowdown on The Trip.

**“Marketing to small businesses is almost more of a B2C emotional sell, than a B2B rational sell.”**

**So, James. What made you trek around the country, interviewing small business owners?**

Think Small is an Earnest Labs project. Labs is where Earnest looks for creative ways to solve business problems. Sure, we could've just commissioned some research and written a report. But we knew that by putting in the hard yards, we'd get genuine insight straight from the horse's mouth – and that's way more valuable to clients.



**Hertz offer a range of high-performance vehicles. Why the Skoda Octavia?**

The trip was all about meeting the 'everyman' of England. The Octavia (or Chyna, as we named her) was the perfect fit. Besides, the Skoda's a very respectable drive. It's not the 1980s.

**You interviewed owners of very different businesses – what did they have in common?**

The sheer level of hard work they put in to running their own show. There was very little distinction between their personal life and work life. Which means marketing to small businesses is almost more of a B2C emotional sell than a B2B rational sell.



# “It really struck me just how far outside of the small business network Big Brands are.”



## What surprised you most about small businesses?

What a tight-knit community they are. They all want to do business with each other. And there's an appreciation that they're all in it together – something we called 'The Nod'. It really struck me just how far outside of this network Big Brands are.

## What impressed you most?

Their dedication. They maintain that passion even during the tough times.

## What three things most irked small businesses about Big Brands?

- 1 Not getting to know them well enough to understand their issues.
- 2 Jumping right in with selling, instead of helping.
- 3 Treating them as small fry and acting disinterested. Or treating them like large enterprises and talking jargon.

## One piece of advice for brands?

I'll give you two.

- 1 Do whatever it takes to become part of the small business community. Owners will be far more receptive to what you've got to say.
- 2 Be the most helpful brand. Offer your support and you'll earn their respect.

## Finally, what's your rebuttal to accusations from people (friends, colleagues, your Mum) who say you just went on a two-week jolly to avoid proper work?

Jealousy. Plain and simple. It was an amazing experience that taught me so much about how to market to small businesses. And how rubbish my driving is.



# Ready to Think Small?

## Plenty more where this came from

Get tonnes more insight on our Think Small microsite. (It won some award or other, but we don't like to brag about it... who are we kidding, it won Best Microsite at the 2018 Global ACE Awards and we're dead proud.)

Search 'Think Small Earnest'.

Here's just a taster of how we can help.

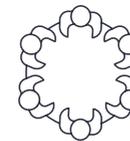


### Draft a small business marketing brief

Let us unpick all the knots and come up with a tangle-free strategy.

### Run an ideas sprint

Get a shot of pure Earnest creativity to inspire your campaign.



### Host a small business roundtable

Talk face to face with small business owners for direct-from-source insight.

Give us ring on **020 3463 9447**.

Or let's meet.

Our place or yours.

(Have small business expertise, will travel.)

**EARNEST**

23 Fitzroy Street  
London W1T 4BP

020 3463 9447  
[www.earnest-agency.com](http://www.earnest-agency.com)  
[info@earnest-agency.com](mailto:info@earnest-agency.com)