



Escape the Tag of Small Business

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Small is never a good word to use with the male of the species, unless you are Steve Jobs announcing another Ipod thingy. Words do count. Case in point – when the magazine *Small Business Canada* re-launched as *Enterprise*, readership soared. Sensitivity around words is why Third World became the phrase to use rather than poor country. Small Business needs a similar re-branding because it just gets worse with terms like micro-lending (code for lending to females). Next up could be teensy-weensy lending or children-around-her-ankles lending.

A big mistake owners make is to allow the tag of “Small Business” to box in their ideas to two years forward, max. Have you noticed how sheepish owners get when describing their big dream if their office is in the basement and there is one employee? What they need to say is why their product or service is staggeringly different from all the others. They should say it boldly and often to their customers, their families and that one employee and soon, it will become the DNA of their business. They should also keep in mind that many an extraordinary business began at the kitchen table – Martha Stewart and Body Shop being two obvious examples. Here in Canada, there's Victoria Sopik who created Kids & Co Childcare, now a national company, and those three parents in Kelowna who started Club Penguin and sold it to Disney for \$700,000 million. (That's right – *million*. Say it again with an Austin Powers accent.)

Ralph Lipschitz started up with a line of ties, but he talked the big dream even to his first customers. He described ‘aspirational’ living – he sold the Ivy League lifestyle and the lift from this original concept carried for forty years. The woman or man buying a product from Lipschitz's company instinctively knows the brand lends to the old money aura.

Ironically, although Lipschitz was from a poor neighbourhood (Calvin Klein's old hood too) he had the soul of refined living which emerged through his brand - Ralph Lauren. Even as a teen, Ralph drew comments with his expensive suits. He had passion and put himself in the head of his most desirable customers - the Ivey Leaguers. What would get them to spend money? A shirt that looked as if it had seen the rugby fields of Eton? You bet. Under what band name – Lipschitz or Lauren? Ralph got over himself and was never sheepish about his vision – so far from his own origins. All owners of Small Business need a daily dose of Ralph's chutzpah!



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Enough of the big vision, now for the nails down the blackboard, excruciating attention to detail is usually what's missing in a small business. Ralph Lauren excelled at both. If you check out the movies of Robert Redford, you might suspect that Ralph was a serious stalker. Exhibit A, the Ralph Lauren catalogue: *The Way We Were* – Robert unattainable in the Ralph Lauren Ivey League line, *Butch Cassidy and the Sun Dance Kid* – Redford in Ralph's Chaps casual jeans and cowboy boots, *The Great Gatsby* – Robert glows in linen suits and white tennis togs, *Out of Africa* – voila! Redford, all manly in Ralph's Safari line featuring khaki, tan and the well bred, colonial look. It's as if Ralph Lauren was a lepidopteras, capturing Robert Redford in his net and pinning him like a butterfly under his magnifying glass. All the details of these movies' different seasons and places of the wealthy and beautiful were transferred by Ralph Lauren into accessible products.

Suddenly, you did not need your own grandfather complete with Boston pedigree to have the perfect cashmere sweater made in Scotland. You could buy it from Ralph Lauren and *bonus*; it didn't come with that annoying moth ball smell. Now the great unwashed masses could choose to put on the Harvard look and play dress up, blend the education classes and cross the cultural divide – just as Ralph Lipschitz did. And boy did the customers buy the big dream. Take a leaf out of Lipschitz's book: You are not a small business (with one line of ties), you are so much more.