

64: Free Samples

Give something away for free

It's a noisy world out there. In order to get people to notice you amid the din, give something away for free.

Smart companies know giving away freebies is a great way to lure in customers. Look at Apple. They offer iTunes software for free in order to build demand for the iPod and the iTunes music store. In the offline world, retail outlets do the same. Starbucks says a new purchase is stimulated for every five beverage samples they give away to customers. Not too shabby.

For us, Writeboard and Ta-da list are completely free apps that we use to get people on the path to using our other products. Also, we always offer some sort of free version of all our apps.

We want people to experience the product, the interface, the usefulness of what we've built. Once they're hooked, they're much more likely to upgrade to one of the paying plans (which allow more projects or pages and gives people access to additional features like file uploading and ssl data encryption).

Bite-size chunks

Make bite-size chunks: Devise specialized, smaller offerings to get customers to bite. Resolve to sub-divide at least one product or service into bite-size chunks that are inexpensive, easy or fun.

—Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba, authors of [Church of the Customer Blog](#)
(from [What is customer evangelism?](#))

Give Away Your Hit Single

Consider giving one of your songs (per-album) as a free promotional download to the world — to be like the movie trailer — like the hit single sent to radio — the song that makes people want to go buy your music.

Don't worry about piracy for this song. Let people play it, copy it, share it, give it away. Have the confidence that if the world heard it, they will pay for more.

—Derek Sivers, president and programmer, [CD Baby](#) and [HostBaby](#). (from [Free Promo Track](#))

65: Easy On, Easy Off

Make signup and cancellation a painless process

Make it as easy as possible to get in — and get out — of your app.

If I'm a customer that wants to use your app, it should be a painless, no-brainer process. Provide a big, clear, signup button that pops and put it on each page of your marketing site. Tell folks how easy it is: "From sign-up to login in just 1 minute!"

There should always be a free option so customers can demo the app without entering credit card information. Some of our competitors require a call back, an appointment, or a special password in order to try their product. What's the deal with that? We let anyone try our apps for free at any time.

Keep the signup form as short as possible. Don't ask for stuff you don't need and don't throw a long daunting form at people.

The same principles hold true for the cancellation process. You never want to "trap" people inside your product. While we're sorry when people decide to cancel their Basecamp account, we never make that process intimidating or confusing. "Cancel my account" is a link that's clear as day on a person's account page. There shouldn't be any email to send, special form to fill out, or questions to answer.

Also, make sure people can get their data out if they decide to leave. We make sure customers can easily export all messages and comments in xml format at any time. It's their data and they should be able to do with it what they want.

This is crucial because giving people control over their information builds trust. You're giving them a bridge to their data island. You're allowing them to leave without penalty if they find a better offer. It's the right thing to do and it builds goodwill.

Exit with Ease

Don't hold users against their will. If they want to leave, let them pick up with all of the content they created while they were on your site and leave...for free... You have to let the barn door open and focus on keeping your customers fed, so they want to come back, instead of coming back because they're stuck.

—Charlie O'Donnell, analyst, Union Square Ventures (from 10 Steps to a Hugely Successful Web 2.0 Company)

66: Silly Rabbit, Tricks are for Kids

Avoid long-term contracts, sign-up fees, etc.

No one likes long term contracts, early termination fees, or one time set-up fees. So avoid them. Our products bill on a month to-month basis. There's no contract to sign and you can cancel at any time without penalty. And there are never any set-up fees.

Don't try to find "tricky" ways to get more cash. Earn it.

67: A Softer Bullet

Soften the blow of bad news with advance notice and grandfather clauses

Need to deliver bad news like a price increase? Make it as painless as possible by giving folks plenty of advance notice. Also, consider a grandfather period that exempts existing customers for a certain period of time. These folks are your bread and butter and you want to make them feel valued, not gouged.