



The Age of the Customer - Prepare for the Moment of Relevance

Ellen Rohr and [Jim Blasingame](#)

Ellen: This is Ellen Rohr, and welcome to Business Makeover 2014. I'm enjoying this moment in our lives, where we get to reboot. We just wrapped up 2013 and 2014 is in front of us like a blank slate and we get to make it whatever we want it to be. Unless you change the way you think, act and engage with people, with business and with customers, you're going to create the same old year. You'll be on that treadmill going the same direction.

It's an honor to do this series of interviews and I'm so happy to introduce you to one of my best friends forever, Jim Blasingame. Hi Jim.

Jim: Hi Ellen, how you doing?

Ellen: I'm so excited to be here and I'm kind of star struck. Jim and I met because I was and have been a regular guest and member of his brain trust on the Small Business Advocate show. He is an awesome radio host, a high energy keynote speaker and just before the call he told me he wakes up everyday as if he was going fishing. You love what you do.

Jim: I sure do. I've been doing this for 16 years and it's because of people like you, who join me everyday on my show and bring your high energy, great information and motivation and contributions. Mostly, it's because we both know that small business owners are worthy of whatever effort we can give them. They inspire me everyday and the idea of getting up and serving them in some way, making a difference to them, I don't know what I could do that would be more fulfilling for me.

Ellen: You and I are both big fans of business, because a business of your own is a personal transformational path. Ali Brown said, *'the greatest self-help or self development course you can take is starting a business of your own.'* **Would you agree with that?**

Jim: There's no question about it. It's also the hardest job in the world.

Ellen: It is, in that it takes some courage. Another quote I like is this... *'Leaders are visionaries with no awareness of the odds against them.'* Being too smart sometimes gets in the way.

Jim: There's no question. All of us say if I'd known it was going to be this hard I wouldn't have done it, but that's not really true. The thing is, it is hard and being the CEO of a small business is a harder job than being the CEO of Exxon, IBM or any of those companies. I know those guys and what they do. They don't have the risks. They aren't all in like small business owners are.

Ellen: That's true. Today, before we get going, because you and I are going to have a great conversation today and I'm excited to share our topic. I love our title, which is also the title of your brand new book. You've also written two others, so this is your third book.

Jim: That's right.

Ellen: That's awesome. We'll give you information later on about how you can be one of the first on your block to get and give *The Age of the Customer*. Let's talk about that. You've been in the game for 16 years and this is what you really want to share with people, is how customers are changing and how becoming relevant is the most important part of being in business today. Share a little of your story Jim and how you became involved with Small Business Advocacy like you are.

Jim: I was a good employee for 23 years and I was downsized twice in 18 months in the 80s. The last time I thought that I should dust off my resume and then I had a second thought and decided against that, and instead I'm going out on my own because I don't need help screwing up my life I can do that by myself. So I started my own business in 89', a consulting business for small businesses. My tagline was I'm a vice president you can rent.

That's what I did for a number of years and then in 97' I started my media company which includes the radio show, the publishing company, writing and all of that and now I've been doing that for 16 years. It's all in service for almost 25 years to small businesses. So that's how I got into it. A lot of times people will ask me how it happened and I just say some form of mental illness, but I think most small business owners would nod their head to that.

One of the great things I've had the opportunity to do for the last 16 years and it's helped me with my message and the things I'm getting across, has been to be the repository and the filter of the knowledge, inspiration, information and the perspectives of really smart people like you, Ellen, who are out there fighting the good fight, developing new ideas, pushing the envelope, you join me on my show and then I get four interviews everyday. So over 16 years, I've been able to coalesce a lot of ideas and my new book is a product of that.

I'm proud of it and excited to make it available to folks. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you and talk about it today.

Ellen: We want to dig into *The Age of the Customer*, but I want to underline something you just said about people helping each other. That was my inspiration for these 21 days 21 plus experts, because 21 days is what it takes to establish a new habit and it takes discipline and new thoughts to create new beliefs, to create new behaviors to get different results. I so relate to what you're saying and I encourage you to immerse yourself in conversations with people who have different opinions or may be smarter than you in some areas.

No one mentor is perfect, but the soup of solid conversation about business is absolutely one of the things you're going to find as a factor in every successful business owners life. They reach out, they think and decide for themselves but they take in other information from other smart people. Your brain trust, I'm happy to be a member of that because there are so many smart people that roll through your radio show.

Jim: I want to interject regarding something you just said there, Ellen. Here's something I really want to encourage every small business owner and entrepreneur, every CEO of any size company... don't be afraid to ask a question regarding something you don't know. You're not supposed to have all the answers and if you ever have a question that you want to ask and you don't ask a mentor or a neighbor, someone that you meet or a friend that's in the business, if you don't ask because you're afraid that I'm going to think you're not competitive if you don't know the

answer, you're preventing yourself from having information you need. Don't let the idea that you should already know something, keep you from asking the questions.

Ellen: That brings up something for me, which is that I learned that when it came to my financials. That's when I finally sat down and started asking, what does that word mean? What are you talking about? I thought equity was my money, how come that money isn't in my bank account? I didn't understand how it works.

Jim: How many people think revenue is income? A lot of newspaper reporters think that. A lot of writers think that. The other thing, Ellen, that I'd like to point out, is that ladies are not as bad about that as guys are.

Ellen: You think this is a sexist thing, that women are better about asking questions?

Jim: Women will ask questions to a much greater degree because they don't have the monumental egos that men have.

Ellen: I hate to jump on that bandwagon because I'm a woman and that would be easy to do, but I will take that as a compliment.

Jim: It is. When I go speak to audiences that I've been invited to by the Chamber or whatever, there are a much higher percentage of women in the audience that are representing small businesses in the area.

Ellen: This will leap frog us into the discussion about customers and how they're changing and the marketplace is changing. Another characteristic of my favorite businesses and business owners is this understanding of how to be of service. Every time you and I get on the phone, you always ask me, what can I do to be of service to you today? How can I help you today, Ellen? Your life is one of service and being of service, coming from outside instead of being obsessed with ourselves and how we're going to look if we ask the dumb question, or being obsessed with having to know everything or be right.

Putting the customer first and getting outside of yourself, remembering you're calling to be of service is transformative and is a characteristic of the greatest business owners. That's what I'm getting from the preview I've seen of *The Age of the Customer*.

Jim: Right. The interesting thing is that this book isn't about customer service. It's about how customers have become empowered and if you aren't aware of that and you don't know how that empowerment has changed the rules of the marketplace then you're operating in parallel universes, as I describe it in the book. *The Age of the Customer* is overriding the age of the seller. The age of the seller is 10k years old and it's how you and I grew up. We grew up in the age of the seller in all our training, education and experiences is based on the seller having control of the information.

Ellen: Let's talk about that because that's a pretty provocative statement. That number I had to look at a couple times. You maintain that something that's happening in business right now is something we haven't experienced in 10k years of market action.

Jim: Few people have been able to say this in history, but right now we live in a time where there's a transition between one 10k year old age to the new age. We're in the beginning of the age of the customer and at the end of the age of the seller, which is 10k years old and everything that we've all learned and experienced as customers, business owners or observers, what we learned in school, from our parents, whatever, all of that is being overridden by the age of the

customer and there's only one thing that's changed. The customer now has control of the information, whereas, for 10k years the seller had control.

I break it down into three segments.

- The product is owned by the seller.
- The buying decision is owned by the customer.
- In the age of the seller the seller owned the information.

When I was selling years ago on commission, I was my customers Internet. I brought them the information they needed and they were glad to see me. Today we know that's not true. Since 1993 when the Internet went live for commercial customers, ever since then we've been moving towards the age of the customer, where control of that information is much less in the hands of the seller and more in the hands of the customer.

That's changing the rules and it's really hard, Ellen, for us to break loose from that entrenched paradigm of being in control, to now realizing the customer's not only control the information but they control our information. They control our brands. Customers are the co-owners of your brand message.

Ellen: No wonder it's hard to get over this. This is mind blowing, so let's break it down a little bit. So not only have we been dealing with this marketing model where we were in charge, we're going to let you know what our options and your choices are. We're the source of information, like you said, I'm the Internet and now this is shifting, because not only are people gathering their own information they're helping to create our brand. Tell me more about that.

Jim: There's no question. In the book, one of the fun parts of that particular chapter, I call it the 'nu-uh effect'. Remember how when you were a kid and someone said you did so and so and your response was nu-uh. Here's the thing. You own a restaurant and you get to use a little puffery of the business and say freshest salad bar in town. That's one of your brand messages right?

Ellen: Right.

Jim: If I go to your restaurant and eat your salad and I don't think it's very fresh, I go on Yelp or some other site and put it out over Twitter or Facebook and say essentially, nu-uh. What that winds up being is Ellen says her salad bar is the freshest in town but the truth is it's not very fresh. In the age of the customer, guess who now is the co-owner of your brand message? Research approves that people are more likely to value my nu-uh than they are your advertising brand message.

Ellen: Did you feel like, in this 10k year old marketplace, because I'm about 9k years old. I see this as a big shift but my kid who's 28; he's not challenged by the shift in market because he's younger. **Do you see that?**

Jim: Here's how it's manifesting in business owners, I think. We're all experiencing the shift, but way too many small businesses still don't understand that they have to make that shift for the customer. See, as a customer Ellen, you are making shifts effortlessly. You have a smart phone. You're putting apps on your smart phone. If you want to find something you're hitting a button and telling it to find you whatever you're looking for.

You are taking advantage of age of the customer capability, but as a business you may not realize, wait a minute when they push that button something has to happen on the other side where I show up more quickly.

Ellen: I almost feel a little schizophrenic as you say that, because as a customer I do that easily, but as a business owner, even though I know that, I am not as app or mobile friendly and accessible as I should be. I get that.

Jim: Right and I call that relevance. Being accessible, this is why I make a big deal out of relevance and not being necessarily competitive. Being competitive is table stakes, that's just a minimum. Everyone will have to be competitive in the age of the customer, but that won't help you become the one of the last two that a customer considers before they buy.

When you're going to buy something you usually dwindle it down to two people and then somehow you make a decision. In the old days we made a decision about the final company because one had a better price or a better product or service and everybody's stuff like that is commodity these days. You know that. You can go on Amazon and how many different products are the same price? You can go anywhere and get that stuff. That's table stakes. What's trumping competitiveness is relevance.

For example, let's say you have that restaurant we were talking about and let's say it's a pizza business. So you have a website and you're proud of it. Your father who started the pizza business didn't know what a website was. Then, if I go to your town and type in pizza on my smart phone and up pops two offerings, yours and the guy around the corner who also owns a pizza store, but he has a mobile site, not a website.

Ellen: Right or maybe even a Groupon announcement that's going out.

Jim: Keep it simple. Let's say he has a mobile site, and you know what that does.

Ellen: I do. That's one that will show up nicely and easily on a mobile device.

Jim: Right, but wait. Your pizza's is better than his and it's cheaper than his. You're nicer than that guy but I can't read your website in my phone and he has a mobile site that not only can I see but I can push the button easily with my finger and call them to see if they have a buffet. My point is they aren't as competitive as you are but they're more relevant to me right now.

Ellen: A lot of folks that I work with, and you know I love me the dirty jobs with plumbing, heating, cooling, electrical, restoration and chimney sweeps, these are my people and in that world there is still the need for someone to go knock on someone's door. It doesn't take away the interaction that's going to happen with smart phones, iPads and everything else. **Is there a way to establish relevance that is almost a retro-visit back to that one to one in-person encounter?**

Jim: There are two chapters in section two of the book. One is all about the cloud and how you will use it and that chapter is even called 'your future in the cloud'. The chapter behind it comes up and says 'no, handshake in the cloud.' I say Ellen, that face-to-face is the original social media.

Ellen: And there is that opportunity to visit someone in person to shake their hands and look them in the eye.

Jim: But here's the thing and this is what I mean by the moment of relevance. You and I both know that everyone who gets their chimney swept doesn't wait until someone knocks on the door, some of them will look for someone in that marketplace.

Ellen: They're going to go on YouTube to see if they can do it themselves.

Jim: Now you've brought up a good point. So, if one of your chimney sweeps has a website but doesn't have a YouTube channel and another chimney sweep went to the trouble to make a 90-second crude, rude video, nothing fancy on YouTube that showed their face, their voice and made them sound as though they knew what they were talking about, that's not being more competitive, because maybe they're higher. However, it makes them more relevant to the person who's looking for a chimney sweep and that extra effort that puts the power of decision that anything you can do to let the customer help themselves to make a decision or serve themselves, that's where relevance is different from service.

Ellen: Yes, and it's also going to be then applying knowledge of different personality types, like someone who is a driver and bossy-pants is going to say how fast can I get the expert to my door. Whereas, someone who's a little more relationship-oriented might go to your website and look at your site and see pictures of your kids and employees. It will be much different.

Jim: That's right. That's the person who's motivated by the relevance they're looking for, which in that case is values.

Ellen: Relationships.

Jim: That's right. So you have to understand that customers today, and see this is why the moment of relevance is so important, is because oftentimes you're being ruled in or out by the prospect, the suspect in a moment with the click of a mouse or the push of a button on our smart phones, before you even know they exist.

Ellen: **How do you become the chosen one at the moment of relevance?**

Jim: That's the key and it's all about doing everything you can to put yourself in the position, from the perspective of the age of the customer, customer. What are they looking for and making sure that when you go around to that side of the desk, so to speak, when you're on the outside of the door waiting for someone to unlock it so you can come into the website or the store, that you've covered those basis. So you've not only made your catalogue available to them, but if you have an ecommerce site that will take a credit card, make sure you take PayPal too.

Ellen: Take all the credit cards.

Jim: Exactly, but you've been somewhere where they took a credit card but didn't take PayPal and I'm not trying to sell PayPal, but I'm saying that a lot of people who are going to find you with their mobile devices are going to want you to take PayPal. That's a relevance thing.

Ellen: Give me an example of someone who gets it. **Does Amazon get this?**

Jim: I feel they do. Let me say this. Instead of telling you who get it, let me tell you who has an advantage. This is huge, because anyone can get it. Everyone listening to us now, by close of business tomorrow, you can look at them and say they get it now. Some of this can be fixed just that quickly, but here's the thing. Here's where I'll talk about who has the advantage, it's small business because relevance is in the eye of the beholder, in the mind of the beholder and heart and ears of the beholder. Who is closer to those senses than a small business?

Ellen: You're saying that even a cool business like Amazon or Starbucks are so big...

Jim: They can't even hold a candle. In the age of the customer, big companies are at a distinct disadvantage. For example, I work for big companies, they're my sponsors and I love them. They know I tell it like it is. When I was working with one big company helping them reach small business owners, a few years ago they were trying to get one tweet out of 140 characters and the attorney's clucked over that tweet for 10 days.

So, if you take that silly example and write that large over all aspects of reaching customers, small businesses don't have to have a committee about stuff like that.

Ellen: I got goosebumps. That is so exciting.

Jim: It's huge. Small businesses have incredible advantage when it comes to the age of the customer. The age of the customer is being driven, in my opinion, by individuals, by customers and nobody has an opportunity to be closer to the relevance moment of a customer than small business. It's my goal and thank you for helping me, to get this message out. This book is not just another business book. I believe that my book *The Age of the Customer* will become a utility for small businesses.

Ellen: Let me ask you this. Suppose you're a small business and you have 10 employees. I would feel strongly about making sure all 10 of my employees were empowered to respond to the customer. So even with 10 employees you can act like a bigger company or like a small company, which means you're going to empower those team members to listen, to respond, and to make decisions at the customer level.

Jim: Right, and the relevance factor there is, empower them to think relationship not transaction.

Ellen: To think values not transactions, right?

Jim: That too. What I just said is all about your values. For example, if something breaks or somebody brings something back and you aren't sure how it got broken but you feel this isn't a customer that's been abusing you or whatever, just give them another one. Tell your employees to give them another one, but wait boss we could lose \$100 on that. Fine, we'll get it back if we do the right thing.

Ellen: And that's something we can communicate at the small business level so much easier.

Jim: Yes, and you almost never see it happen in a bigger company and this is relevance because now we're talking about values and I devote an entire chapter to values in the book and to trust.

Ellen: That's where the paradox comes in that we can use cool groovy media and technology to enhance old school values and relationship magic.

Jim: No question. When I think of analog small business love. It hasn't changed in 10k years. In the book there's one chapter called 'What hasn't changed' and small business love is one of those things. We always love up our customers, but what has changed are the different ways that we have to reach out and connect with our customers, build community and be relevant to them. So, what I tell small business owners is that it's not either or it's both and.

Ellen: Let's continue this with the salesperson. We have a lot of, even now in this great dawning age of the customer, I still feel like I get abused by salespeople, who are operating on some archaic...

Jim: They're still in the age of the seller.

Ellen: What do salespeople need to know about this new age of the customer?

Jim: Chapter 16 of the book is called 'The age of the Customer has changed the rules of selling'. Ellen, I've been selling since I was five years old. I worked my way through college on selling on commission.

Ellen: What did you sell at five years old, lemonade?

Jim: I would sing in my uncle's restaurant and then pass the hat and they'd give me a nickel in my ball cap. I was shining shoes in the fourth grade. I had my own shoe shine business, so I'm a world-class professional salesman. That may be one of the few things I can actually say that about. I know sales and what's happening now in sales and this is one of the most important chapters, especially B2B, but not just B2B, there's also business to consumer.

In the old days, and remember when I used to be my customer's Internet, we can presume especially if it was something fairly new, that they didn't know much about it and we could start with, this is a copier. Press the button and it makes the copy come out. Today, you can't do that or you're going to insult them, waste their time and annoy them, so what you have to do today in sales and this is one part of the rules that have changed, you have to make sure you know where the customer is in their journey of understanding.

If they walk into your retail shop, you need to come up with probing questions and train your people to do as much, so they can plug in to exactly where the customer is because they literally may be to the point where all they're trying to decide is, do I want periwinkle or reflex blue?

Ellen: Or, do I want my guy to back it up? I understand the product better, I just want a guy.

Jim: Yes, I want to hold it and feel the textures. They may literally be that far along and if you start out with, this is a copier you're just going to annoy them. That's one thing and it's the same thing for B2B, but here's the big B2B change, the shift in the age of the customer for B2B. You talk about chimney sweeps, you're knocking on the door, hi, I'm Jim how do you like me so far? You're doing that kind of thing and here's the thing. In my day, businesses expected salespeople to call on them it was a big part of their day. You know today nobody wants you to call on them or come knocking on the door, because if they need something they'll let you know.

What I'm saying is this. I break the sales process into two steps.

1. One is getting in the door and be able to see if you can qualify people.
2. Two is closing them for the business.

What I'm saying is in the age of the seller that was a short period of time, because 8 out of 10 people who tried to get in the door, got in. Then the customer had to deal with 8 people. In the age of the customer, that process is taking longer because the customer isn't letting 8 people in the door they're only letting two in, maybe. Sometimes just one, because they're ruling people in and out before they ever let them in the door.

Ellen: Is it still relevant to go visiting? It seems to me like that might be more relevant than ever.

Jim: Cold calling is a fools errand. A true cold call and knocking on doors is a fools errand today. However, that's not to say you can't nudge them or reach out to them and find a way to meet them. You can't stalk them at a chamber mixer, because there are too many ways to connect with people or to get a referral for them. The main thing is that people are expecting business owners and decision-makers are expecting you to come to them in a way that's relevant to them, not just you knocking on the door acting like they have nothing to do but give you their time.

Ellen: I hear you.

Jim: That doesn't work anymore. One last thing. When the last two people get through what I call the relevance firewall, into step two, the closing process now is much shorter and you're only one of two to be ruled in or out, not one of eight. This is in chapter 16, along with a diagram and more. The point is and what I'm upset about in a way, Ellen, is that there are businesses out there who are still sending their salespeople out with age of the seller perspectives and training.

They aren't getting the business they think they should be getting and they think it's because they don't have the right people, they haven't trained them right or they aren't doing their jobs or they just aren't executing. All that does is create a casualty list. What's really happening is the customer has changed the rules and if you don't play by the new rules then you'll wind up going out of business.

Ellen: I can see the danger too, because the boss might say I've been in your position. All you have to do is knock on 100 doors but you'll burn people out that way, because it isn't as friendly.

Jim: That day is over.

Ellen: Once upon a time we used to welcome the Fuller Brush salesman, but now if someone drives up my lane that I don't know, I have the phone in one hand ready to call 9-1-1. It's a lot different.

Jim: The rules have changed.

Ellen: I am a big fan of using the fact that in plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical, using the fact that in businesses where you do have the opportunity, a massage therapist or hair stylist, when we have to work directly one-to-one we want to leverage those relationships. You're saying...

Jim: You have to ask for referrals.

Ellen: Yes. I love that.

Jim: Referrals are golden. I did and still do make my living on referrals. If you have a referral it's not money in the bank but it's money in the parking lot.

Ellen: That's what breaks down the fear. Mrs. Fernwicky your neighbor, we had a great experience and here's what she had to say. Here's her postcard picture, you might mail it to those folks before you then make the visit. I love that or put it on your Facebook page and get a little awareness about your values, what you do and what kind of service you provide, so when you do make the face-to-face they may know a little about you already.

Jim: That's exactly what's happening right now. Here's the thing that's happening simultaneously. While you want them to get to know you, before they even give you the chance to know them they're simultaneously doing their own due diligence, research online and finding out who you

are. That way by the time you actually get the opportunity to meet them face-to-face, you're already...

In the old days, Ellen, we qualified our customers. We talked to them and asked them questions to see if they were qualified to be our customers. Today customers are pre-qualifying you before you even know they exist.

Ellen: What I'm getting from this conversation is that it comes down to asking questions and good salespeople always ask questions. The difference is in the questions we're asking. What's new to the conversation is a question along the lines, if I'm the seller and show up at your door, my questions would now include something like, tell me how far in the process of investigating your system you are? Tell me what you've learned so far.

Jim: Maybe the customer walks in or call you to come to them, and you say thank you so much for coming, I noticed that you're interested in these snow tires, would you mind me asking what you know about them so far.

Ellen: That's a good question.

Jim: They will appreciate that.

Ellen: Yes, because when I was sharing moments ago about being violated by some sales experiences, most of the time it's people talking at me and making assumptions about me without knowing the first thing about why I'm here or what my needs are or what I've already found out about the product and services.

Jim: Here's a classic violation. You can go into any car companies website and build your dream car in about eight minutes. You can do all that and if you want you can push a button and even order the darn thing. Then you go to a lot to look at an actual automobile in front of you and the salesperson never say, have you been to our website and built your dream car on the website? If they did and I said yes...

Ellen: How easy would that be to add to the process?

Jim: Right. What they'll do is say yes, let me show you this thing. We actually had a guy the other day when we were looking around for a car. He was showing me the electric door locks. Holy mackerel. We were almost ready to buy but he never got it.

Ellen: It's interesting too in my industry as the plumber's wife, it wasn't that long ago where if you wanted a toilet your only choice was to call a plumber and the only reason you would buy a toilet is if the 30-year old one you had actually broke. What happened is because, and I'll lay the blame on the doorstep of the plumbing professionals as wonderful as they are, they just didn't get that people were changing. Therefore, places like Home Depot and the Internet evolved and now you go to someone's house and it's a complicated hydronic heating system and they know what an air separator is.

This is something that was a foreign language to people not that long ago, so it is a whole new world.

Jim: If you go in there and don't try to find out that they know about those things, the truth is they may be ready to say I'll take it, now let's talk about whether I need this size unit or that size. So many people are missing sales because they're behind where the customer is because their head is still in the age of the seller and the customers is in the age of the customer.

Ellen: With as much as is available online, commodities lead us in the direction of price as the deciding factor. Like if you and I both sell rice, all things being equal I'm going to buy the cheapest rice. **Do you think we're moving towards commodities? How do you establish a niche in light of all this information?**

Jim: The commodity thing happened a long time ago, that's not new that's old news. Remember this, and I'd like to quote John Nesbitt on this, one of the greatest futurists of our time, who wrote *Mega Trends*. I've had the pleasure of interviewing him twice on my show. He said, '*the more high tech we have the more high touch we will want.*'

Ellen: That's a beautiful way to say that.

Jim: People still do business with people and here's the thing. You have to be competitive, that's table stakes. But if you can rise above being competitive and be relevant and you can give your customers an experience that makes them feel more confident, makes them have more peace of mind and makes them feel like they've made a good choice. They won't be as beholden to the price. If you want price on tires you go to Walmart. If you want peace of mind you'll go to Billy Bob's Tire Store, a local guy, who's going to make sure your family isn't driving around on bad tires and will give you a good evaluation. That's a relevance factor that you don't get at Walmart.

Ellen: Speaking of Walmart, because they are going to sell low priced stuff to the masses. **What do you say about how we've lost that battle?**

Jim: I don't know, the price war is over and we've lost.

Ellen: Right, if you're going for the lowest price that's over we've lost that.

Jim: The price war is over. Small business is lost and thank God we understand that. I tell small business owners, you should thank Walmart for coming to town. The only people who are the exception to that are drugstores and grocery stores. Bless your hearts, I'm not even sure how to handle that part of it, but everything else, thank the big boxes for coming to town because if you're a small business you don't have to conquer the world to be successful, you may only need 100 customers.

When I had my consulting business I only needed 8 customers.

Ellen: Let's talk about that because then that begs the conversation of the niche business.

Jim: Right.

Ellen: I like what you said and even as you say it about supermarkets, we are seeing Whole Foods come. They call it Whole Paycheck because it's expensive, but it's beautiful wonderful lovely food and that's an even bigger chain, but you could create a local market with a slow food movement approach.

Jim: I call it niches of niches. There's a whole chapter designed solely about niches in the book. The thing is the thing to remember is that everybody in the phonebook is not a small businesses prospect. Only the people who want the special sauce that you have. Only the people are going to do business with you and the worst thing you can do, and in fact, the quickest way to failure is to find those people and not charge them enough.

Ellen: That's why we love each other.

Jim: Here's an imperative. You cannot survive if you don't charge your customers enough money to pay your bills and make a profit. You have to find a way to do that and fighting a price war is a quick way to failure.

Ellen: Let's talk a little about niches. I call it the West Coast Chopper model, which is and alive and well business model. West Coast Chopper are those beautiful motorcycles that are works of art. The business model apparently is, get in line and pay you what I tell you it's going to cost you.

Jim: That's right.

Ellen: So that model works.

Jim: Right but theirs is all about customization.

Ellen: It's customization but there's this idea that this is not for everyone, because not everyone wants to spend \$100k on a motorcycle.

Jim: Right. Remember the soup kitchen on Seinfeld. Small businesses can create that. It's difficult to create that line out your door, but the most important thing is you're going to do business with moving forward, will be less likely concerned about price and more likely to be looking for relevance. Here are three huge relevance factors.

1. They want to know that you have the technology.

This is easy to do in small business these days. That's understood. Mobile wasn't any part of your past but it will dominate your future.

2. You have to have values.

We used to focus on value, now we add an (s) and make it values, and people see that as a differentiator when it comes to relevance.

3. Trust.

If people trust you then they don't have to worry about what you're going to do and they're willing to pay more. People will pay more for companies that they trust than to companies they don't trust.

Ellen: Someone told me and I've used this definition ever since, that the way to create trust is to tell the truth. You tell the truth so it's earned.

Jim: That's right. Be consistent and also do what you say. Be transparent.

Ellen: Right, so even if you screw up you can fall on your sword and make it all better.

Jim: That's right.

Ellen: Excellent.

Jim: So those are key relevance factors that customers are looking for and here's the thing. All customers aren't, which is why I say to thank Walmart for coming to town, because let them go to Walmart. You don't want them taking up your time anyway.

Ellen: There are all those choices. If you want that stuff at that price then go to Walmart. I think that's challenge for small business owners, because it hurts their ego and feelings and they're nice guys so they don't want to hear no.

Jim: Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that more and more, farther and farther down the socioeconomic ladder that people value their time more than their money?

Ellen: Absolutely.

Jim: There you go, that's a huge relevance factor. So whatever you can do to save people time. They'll pay for that. If they have a hard time paying for it then you aren't explaining to them properly why that's important to them. If that still doesn't work then let them go to Walmart.

Ellen: Those three relevance factors are important. I tell my clients if they show up clean, sober, on time and dressed right they can charge four times what their competitors charge.

Jim: That's right.

Ellen: However, that first interaction with your customer is probably going to be an electronic interaction.

Jim: That's right and they're going to rule you in or out before they even know you exist. That's the reason why the technology part has got to be there too. When you see the book you'll see the graphics I use to show how the age of the customer is overriding the age of the seller. The longer you are operating with age of the seller practices, the closer you are to becoming crushed and irrelevant.

Ellen: A dinosaur.

Jim: That's right.

Ellen: That's a nice segue for us to talk about the offer that you've put together for our audience. Everyone can go to BusinessMakeover2014.com/blasingame. That's where the offer is for everyone which is super exciting because you'll be one of the first to buy and share *The Age of the Customer*.

Jim: The book will just be released at the time people hear this. You will be one of or be the first to get it, depending on the day this goes out.

Ellen: Thanks for sharing your launch with our audience in this makeover event. I knew you planned it that way.

Jim: It's a privilege and an honor. Ellen, I want you to know that I love your energy and enthusiasm, but I know the difference between someone who gives a crap and somebody who doesn't and I know you do. I also know the people listening to you get that and I admire you for that. I appreciate you for that and that's the reason why, whenever you want to come on my show you're always welcome.

Ellen: We will continue this love affair and I'll be back on your show. We've never met in person and I am right now, over the electronic waves giving you a big hug. You're one of my favorite people.

Jim: Right back at you.

Ellen: You're awesome! Thank you for joining us everyone. Thank you again for your time Jim.

Jim: By Ellen and small business owners, I'm proud of you so keep up the good work. You're my heroes.

Ellen: Thanks for being our small business advocate. Bye-bye.