

I really enjoy watching basketball. Not necessarily the NBA, but just about every other level. When my boys were little, I remember taking them to the Ankeny High School games and sitting about three rows up, watching those big kids play and talking about the game. When the boys started playing organized basketball on their own, I made it a priority to get to as many of their games as I could.

Eventually I found myself coaching them. It was probably better for me because for some reason in the back of my warped mind, I was much more under control than I was when I was simply a dad watching the game. Not that I was out of control just watching, but I was more likely to get caught up in the game and the officiating. The better I knew the kids, the more I was invested in the game. Like a lot of people, parents of friends of my kids became our friends. And together as parents we would feed off each other.

When I watch those teams, I often volunteer to keep the scorebook or run the scoreboard, again because it gets me involved. We have become invested in all these teams' success, especially our boys' teams. We feel good when they win and hurt with them when they lose. In a word, we are fans.

Now the boys are both playing for Ankeny, Ben for the 8th grade Jaguars, and Ted with the Ankeny High varsity. I have gotten to know their teammates and that has made watching the games even more fun. Ted is lucky enough to be invited to watch some college games and as we get to know some of the coaches and players, we have been more interested in watching their games in person and following their successes in the newspaper.

This phenomenon doesn't just hold true for basketball teams, it holds true in every business. I have long held the belief that people do business with people. People they know, like and trust, in that order. So my question is how well is your business known, liked and trusted? That is a major hurdle for new businesses. It is hard to become known without a big advertising budget, and sometimes even that doesn't work.

Social media certainly helps becoming known, and it is important that you become fluent in how to use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the other social media outlets. You can't just be a follower in these venues; you need to post meaningful and useful information for your customers and potential customers.

Becoming known is only the first step. Once people know who you are, where you are and what you do, they have to like what you do and how you do it. This is not just having them click the "Like" button on your Facebook page. When customers like you, they come back again and more importantly, they tell others, which incidentally helps you to become better known. Finally, people need to trust that you will continually do the right thing. As you can see, this is a pattern that perpetuates itself and contributes to a successful business.

I am not sure how many basketball games I will end up watching this year; I am not sure I want to count them. But I will be invested in most of the teams I watch and will continue to be a fan, and can't think of a better way to enjoy leisure time.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.