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BECOMING THE BEST-KNOWN BUILDER

A practical guide for residential builders

FREE PREVIEW

Introduction, reading route and Chapter 1.

Choose one useful change. Give it an owner and a date.

The complete book, print edition and companion resource access are being prepared.

bestknownbuilder.com

Becoming the Best-Known Builder

Written by Cameron Upton

A practical guide to winning better residential projects, following up properly and building a business that relies less on you.

Introduction

You can be flat out building and still look at the calendar a few months ahead and wonder where the next job is coming from. And when something does come in, you can spend your evening putting a price together, send it off, and hear absolutely nothing.

So you ask for more leads. Fair enough. But if the next ten enquiries follow the same path as the last ten, you have bought yourself more of the same problem.

That is where I want to start, because becoming the best-known builder should give you more choice. Better projects. A steadier pipeline. Enough confidence to turn down work that does not suit you. A business that can keep moving when you are on site, with a client, or taking some time off.

Being known by everyone is unnecessary. Being known and trusted by the right people, for the work you actually want, is useful.

Why I ended up doing this

I am an engineer by background, and my work before Contractor Scale already brought me into the builder market. I am not going to teach you how to build a house. What interested me was the gap between being good at building and having a reliable way to win the right work.

Two problems kept bringing me back to builders. You could teach someone the marketing and they still had no time to do it, and a lot of the advice ignored how long a building decision takes. So you could show a builder how to run an ad in an afternoon, but who was going to answer the enquiry? What would they say to someone without plans? Who would stay in touch while the project developed? Those were the gaps I wanted to help close.

That is the reason Contractor Scale exists. We connect the marketing, sales follow-up and agreed systems around the building business. And it is the reason this book goes beyond advertising. The ad is one part of the job.

When I teach Quick Grab, we start with where the campaign fits and then we build one. When I teach sales, we get into the conversation: what you ask, how you explain the price and what you agree before the meeting finishes. That is how I want you to use this book. Read the explanation, pause at the example, then work out how it applies to your business.

The system you are going to learn

There are three connected parts: lead generation, lead nurture and lead conversion. Generation gets the right person to put their hand up. Nurture helps them understand the project and your approach. Conversion helps both sides make a decision and move into the appropriate next step.

Response connects them. Someone has to notice the enquiry, read it, contact the person and carry the context forward. A clever campaign followed by an unanswered phone is still an unanswered phone.

Imagine a homeowner who sees your project, looks at your website and asks about a renovation. They might be ready to meet. They might be waiting on a designer. They might need to understand whether their idea is remotely affordable. The job is to find that out and help them move appropriately. Calling all three “leads” does not make them the same sales conversation.

You will learn how to work backwards from the projects you need, choose the work you want to be known for, handle enquiries properly, and select the channels that support that plan. You will also learn how to brief someone else to do the work and how to tell whether it is happening.

You do not need a second job in marketing

I want you to understand this well enough to make good decisions. That is different from personally operating every account, writing every email and checking every form. Some of you will start by doing a small amount yourselves. Others already have an office person, a salesperson or an agency. Use what works and make the missing responsibilities clear.

At the end of each chapter, you will see what to decide, what to delegate and what to check. Those are options for the priority you have chosen. They are not sixteen new projects to start on Monday.

I also want to be straightforward about the commercial side. I run Contractor Scale, and if you want help putting this together, I would like you to consider us. You will see how we approach the work and some examples of it. But the teaching needs to stand on its own. If you use the book with your existing team and never become a client, you should still be better off for having read it.

By the end, the useful result is a clear answer to four questions: What work do we want? What is holding us back? Who is doing the next thing? How will we know it helped? Keep those questions beside you. They will save you from doing a lot of marketing that feels productive and changes very little.

The book's companion resources

The complete book will be supported by worksheets, campaign templates, calculators and training. Explore what is coming at bestknownbuilder.com/resources.

Registration and downloads are not open yet. For now, use the first-priority action sheet and worked examples in this preview. Choose one decision, give it an owner and set a date to check it.

You can use the teaching with your own team whether or not we ever work together.

Your Reading Route

Read the foundations and the enquiry-to-sale process first. Use the channel chapters as a reference for the route you choose, then finish with the implementation plan. The diagnostic that follows helps you choose where to concentrate.

If you are opening this between jobs, start with the diagnostic and choose one issue. Read the worked example and the “Decide, delegate, check” section in the chapter it points you to. Then complete the one-page action sheet with the person who will help. You can come back for the other channels when they become useful. Give your team the relevant chapter and a clear responsibility, rather than sixteen chapters to turn into a to-do list.

Part One: Choose the Business You Want

- Chapter 1: Know Your Numbers Before You Spend a Dollar
- Chapter 2: Find Your Lane

Part Two: Turn Enquiries into Progress

- Chapter 3: Your CRM Is Your Sales Brain
- Chapter 4: Respond, Understand and Agree the Next Step
- Chapter 5: Email Marketing: Staying Top of Mind Over the Long Game

Part Three: Attract the Right Work

- Chapter 6: Choosing Your Starting Point: Social Ads vs. PPC vs. SEO
- Chapter 7: Your Website: Your Best Salesperson
- Chapter 8: Social Ads That Actually Work for Builders
- Chapter 9: Google Ads: Match the Search to the Next Step
- Chapter 10: Your Google Business Profile: Get Found Locally
- Chapter 11: Reviews: Let Clients Describe the Experience
- Chapter 12: SEO: The Compound Machine
- Chapter 13: Social Media: Your Digital Portfolio
- Chapter 14: Offline Marketing: Old School Tactics That Still Work
- Chapter 15: Referral Partners: Earn and Keep Useful Relationships

Part Four: Put It to Work

- Chapter 16: Make Room for Better Work

Then: Your First 90 Days • Choosing Who Does the Work • A Next Step with Contractor Scale • Further Training and Source Notes

Start Here: Find the First Useful Change

Before you highlight half the book, take a look at ten recent enquiries and the work already booked. You are looking for the first place the process stops. If you have fewer than ten enquiries, use what you have; this is a practical inspection, not a statistical verdict.

Put each enquiry on a row. Record where it came from, what project it involved, whether someone spoke to the person, the current stage, and the next action. Then put the start dates of genuinely secured work beside the gaps in the delivery calendar. Ask your team to assemble the records. Your job is to help interpret them.

If the future diary is thin

You have delivery capacity and want more suitable work, but there are not enough real conversations coming in. First inspect existing enquiries and referral relationships. Some people may still be waiting for a call you intended to make. Then use the starting-channel chapter to choose one acquisition test you can afford and respond to.

Leave the other channels alone for now. You do not need a new website, a newsletter, three social accounts and an SEO programme before you can test a useful offer. You do need a working response route and enough business credibility for someone to assess you.

If enquiries arrive but nothing seems to happen

Read the CRM, sales and nurture chapters before increasing the advertising budget. Find out whether the enquiries are outside your scope, whether anyone reached them, and whether they understood the next step. “They did not answer” and “they wanted work we do not do” need different fixes.

Your first useful change might be assigning someone to call, improving the initial message or arranging a proper proposal discussion. More traffic can wait until you understand what is happening to the traffic you already paid for.

If you are busy with the wrong work

Start with the numbers and the Ten Jobs Test. Look at contribution, estimating effort, supervision and how the work fits the team. Then decide which projects should lead your message and which you are still willing to accept.

Being busy does not mean the marketing is doing the right job. Equally, moving to bigger contracts does not automatically improve the company. You are choosing the work around which you want to build a repeatable business.

If every decision waits for you

Start with the shared enquiry record and the capacity chapter. Write down what only you can decide, what another competent person could decide, and what information they need. Give one repeatable responsibility to someone with the time and authority to own it.

If all you do is add a new tool and ask the team to use it, you may still be the person everyone waits for. The handover needs a result, an owner and a way to deal with exceptions.

If the business is strong but looks ordinary online

Use the website, project content, reviews and search chapters. The first job is to make your existing expertise visible. Pick one service and one project that demonstrate it. Explain the decisions behind the photographs, then connect that evidence to a clear next step.

You do not need to manufacture a different personality or become an influencer. A homeowner needs to understand why your way of doing the work suits their project.

Turn the diagnosis into one sentence

Write: "Our first priority is ____ because the records show _____. ____ owns the work, and we will review ____ on _____."

Here is a fictional example: "Our first priority is responding to renovation enquiries because seven of the last twenty have no recorded contact attempt. Our sales coordinator owns the daily response list. The owner will review uncontacted enquiries and actual conversations next Friday."

That is something a person can act on. "Improve marketing" is not. If the evidence is missing, the first priority can be to establish the record. Keep that work bounded so collecting data does not become a way to avoid making a decision.

What stays with you, and what can move

Keep the business choices with the owner or the person authorised to make them: the work you accept, the contribution you need, the capacity you can promise, the spending limit and the commitments you make to clients. You should also approve claims about your work and changes to your sales offer.

Give coordination to a named person: maintaining the enquiry record, arranging calls, following up on agreed dates, collecting project material and bringing exceptions to the right person. An owner can do this initially, but recognise it as a role that needs time, not something that will happen between everything else.

Give specialist work to someone competent in it: campaign setup, technical tracking, website changes, content production and automation. Brief the business outcome, supply the actual material and ask them to demonstrate the finished route. You do not need to become a specialist to ask where an enquiry went.

A sensible handover sounds like this: “Please review the last twenty enquiries, preserve the original messages, and show me which have an owner and an agreed next step. Do not mark someone unsuitable just because their budget is blank. Bring me the projects where you need a decision.”

In the implementation section, I will show you how to put that into a weekly rhythm. For now, choose one priority and let the rest of the book help you solve it. That is how this becomes useful work instead of another folder of good ideas.

Your one-page action sheet

Copy this onto one page and complete it with the person helping you. Keep it beside your weekly review. One priority is enough.

First priority: _____

What we found: the enquiry, project or financial evidence behind that choice.

Result we want: what should work differently when this is done.

My decisions: the scope, spending limit and promises I need to approve.

Person doing the work: name _____; responsibility _____.

Specialist support: task _____; person _____; inputs or access needed _____.

First completed action: _____; due _____. When somebody gets stuck, they come to _____.

Review: on _____ we will inspect _____ and decide what to keep, change or stop.

Defer for now: _____

There is a completed example in Your First 90 Days. Use the same headings to brief your team, your current supplier or us.

Part One: Choose the Business You Want

Chapter 1: Know Your Numbers Before You Spend a Dollar

Before you spend a cent on ads, before you hire a marketing person, before you redo your website, you need to know your numbers. Not the rough ones you tell people at the pub. The real ones.

A builder can know last year's turnover and still have no clear connection between this month's marketing and the next signed job. So before we talk about platforms, I want you to be able to work backwards from the work you need. Your accountant or office person can help assemble the numbers. You make the business decision.

The Seven Numbers

Write the definition and period beside each number. If you count signed contracts in one place and every enquiry in another, you can make the same business look brilliant or terrible. Keep the starting points consistent.

1. Annual Sales Goal

Separate your target for signed work from revenue recognised during the year. A contract signed in November may contribute much of its revenue next year. Use a delivery forecast for turnover and a sales forecast for the work you need to secure. Both must fit your team and cash requirements.

Set a target that fits the delivery model, team and funding you can actually support. If it requires a major change, put that requirement into the plan rather than assuming marketing alone will produce it.

2. Average Contract Size

Use the average contract value for the type of work you intend to market. Divide the total value of those signed contracts by their number. If you sell both bathrooms and whole-home renovations, calculate them separately before producing a blended business forecast.

This matters because it tells you how many projects you actually need. A builder averaging \$500K per project needs five jobs to hit \$2.5M. A builder averaging \$50K needs fifty. Those are completely different marketing problems.

3. Gross Margin

Not markup. Margin. Revenue minus direct costs (materials, labour, subcontractors), divided by revenue. If you're building a \$500K home and your direct costs are \$375K, your gross margin is 25%.

Use your own job-costing method consistently, with your accountant where needed. Gross profit still has to cover overheads, financing, marketing and the return to the business. A percentage alone does not tell you whether a project is attractive: allow for its duration, risk and management demand. More work at an inadequate contribution can make a cash problem worse.

4. Total Projects Required

Divide the additional signed value still required by the average contract size for the work you want. For example, a \$2.5 million gap at \$250,000 per contract requires ten additional contracts. Work already secured should not be counted again.

Write this number down. Everything else flows from it.

5. Close Rate

Choose a clear starting stage. You might measure signed contracts divided by suitable opportunities where a real conversation established the project. Also measure signed contracts divided by all valid enquiries. Keep those rates separate; the first helps assess the sales process, while the second includes the mix arriving from the channel.

Use a group of enquiries that has had time to progress. Twenty recent contacts can help you inspect the process, but a long sales cycle and a small sample make the percentage uncertain. Keep open opportunities open rather than calling every unsigned enquiry a loss.

6. Total Leads Required

Projects still needed divided by the close rate from the same starting stage gives the number required at that stage. If you need ten additional jobs and historically sign one in four suitable opportunities, you need about forty suitable opportunities. You still need to work out how many raw enquiries produce those forty conversations.

Put the time lag beside that requirement. Forty opportunities arriving evenly through the year will not necessarily produce ten contracts within that same year. Some need to enter earlier, and some projects will move.

7. Cost Per Lead

Calculate this from your own channel and period. Platform spend divided by valid raw enquiries is an advertising cost per enquiry. Spend divided by suitable opportunities is a different measure. Neither should quietly include duplicates, tests or spam in the denominator.

Example dollar figures in this book explain a calculation. They are not current market benchmarks or a promise about your campaign. Keep the currency and tax basis consistent, and distinguish advertising spend from management fees, software, content and the time your team spends selling.

Multiplying the required enquiries by an assumed advertising cost gives a working advertising allowance. It does not give the entire marketing budget. Test the assumption against your market and include the other costs before deciding what the business can sustain.

The Calculator

I use a simple spreadsheet with all seven numbers plugged in. Change one input and everything recalculates. Want to see what happens if you increase your average contract by \$50K? Plug it in. What if you improve your close rate from 25% to 30%? Run the numbers.

This is where it gets interesting. Most builders think the only lever is "get more leads." But often the faster win is improving your close rate or moving up-market. We'll cover both in the chapters ahead.

Use the numbers to choose the business

You may discover that the sales target does not require more projects. It might require a better mix of projects, less rework, a clearer scope or a more reliable sales process. Do not assume a higher contract value automatically means a better margin. A larger job also brings a larger commitment of supervision, cash and risk.

Compare the available options using your completed projects. If a smaller, repeatable service makes a strong contribution without constant owner involvement, it may be a very good business. The purpose of the calculation is to help you choose deliberately.

I am not a big fan of growth for the sake of growth. Before pouring more money into marketing, ask what you want your life and company to look like. More jobs can mean more management, more exposure and less time. Put the intended benefit into the plan as clearly as the revenue target.

Three mistakes worth catching early

The first is spending without knowing where enquiries came from or what happened to them. Give the enquiry a source and carry it into the sales record. Otherwise the busiest channel can receive the most credit even when another source is producing the better work.

The second is expecting a signed contract on the same timetable as a new enquiry. Agree what you expect to learn early and what needs a longer observation period. That makes it possible to correct poor execution without pretending a building decision happens overnight.

The third is trying to sell your way out of weak delivery economics. If expected contribution keeps disappearing through scope gaps or rework, inspect those causes. More work can make that problem larger.

Work backwards from the gap you actually have

Let me run the whole thing through, because this is where a marketing budget starts to mean something. Example Renovations is a fictional business, and every number in this example is

an assumption for teaching. We will use New Zealand dollars excluding GST throughout. These are not campaign benchmarks or Contractor Scale prices.

The owner wants \$3 million in signed work for the sales period and already has \$600,000 secured against that target. So the remaining gap is \$2.4 million. The type of renovation they want averages \$300,000, which means they need eight more contracts.

Their mature enquiry records suggest that one in five suitable opportunities signs. Eight divided by twenty percent gives forty suitable opportunities. Half of valid enquiries become suitable opportunities after a conversation, so the plan needs eighty valid enquiries. At an assumed \$100 in advertising per enquiry, that is \$8,000 of media spending.

Notice what we have not done. We have not treated every form submission as a suitable opportunity, and we have not asked marketing to generate the \$600,000 already secured. We have also kept signed work separate from revenue earned while delivering it. These contracts may build out across a different period.

Eight contracts can sound much more manageable than “we need loads of leads”. But the next question matters just as much: can the company price and deliver them at the right times?

Put the whole cost on the page

Now give the example a twelve-month operating budget. Alongside the \$8,000 of ads, assume \$36,000 for specialist implementation and management, \$1,800 for software and \$4,200 for agreed website and creative work. Check that the last item is genuinely additional, rather than something already included in the service fee. The cash budget is \$50,000.

Allow another 120 hours of internal sales and coordination time at an assumed \$100 an hour. That adds \$12,000 of internal effort, taking the economic cost to \$62,000. If that time is already paid in a salary, do not count it twice when you prepare the company's accounts. Here we are making the resource commitment visible, including work the owner might otherwise call free.

If all eight contracts are won, the cash acquisition cost is \$6,250 per contract and the cost including that internal effort is \$7,750. Compare that with the contribution from the work. At an assumed 25% gross margin, a \$300,000 contract provides \$75,000 before overheads, financing and other business costs.

That does not mean one contract makes the whole programme a good investment. You still have a company to run, delivery risk to carry and a return to earn. It means you now have a useful basis for the discussion. “The ads cost eight grand” was not the complete commitment.

This is also how to compare an agency with doing it internally. Put the same jobs on both sides: strategy, production, setup, response, review and maintenance. A low supplier fee can be expensive if all the missing work lands back on you. An expensive package can still be poor value if it contains work your business does not need.

Check the cash before the forecast makes you feel rich

Suppose the media, management and software spending is spread evenly through the year, and the \$4,200 of asset work is paid at the start. The first three months require \$2,000 of ads, \$9,000 of management, \$450 of software and \$4,200 of assets: \$15,650 in cash, before any extra payroll requirement.

Can the business fund that while opportunities develop? Put the actual expected client-payment dates beside it. Do not assume a building contract will be signed in the first month, or that a future deposit is spare money with no delivery obligations attached.

If that commitment is too large, change the scope before starting. You might first recover suitable existing enquiries, improve proposal progression, or run a smaller intervention with a specific learning objective. A good plan fits the business's runway. It does not rely on everything working immediately.

Give the plan room to be wrong

Keep the same eighty enquiries and forty suitable opportunities, but halve the assumed close rate to ten percent. Now you win four contracts, not eight. The same \$62,000 economic cost becomes \$15,500 per contract, and you have only filled half the intended sales gap.

Alternatively, if you try to preserve the eight-contract goal at that lower close rate, you need eighty suitable opportunities and 160 valid enquiries. At the same assumed advertising cost, the media allowance doubles to \$16,000. Do not automatically double the spend. First ask why the close rate changed and whether estimating, response or delivery can absorb the extra work.

The point of a downside case is to expose the decision while you can still make it calmly. If the only version you can afford is the optimistic one, the plan needs work.

Use a scorecard that leads to a decision

Here is a separate, fictional first-month review. It describes an early test, not the mature annual forecast above:

- Advertising spent: \$1,500. Other service costs are recorded separately.
- Valid enquiries: 20. Advertising cost per valid enquiry: \$75.
- People actually reached: 10. Seven of the remaining ten have no recorded attempt; three have attempts awaiting a reply.
- Suitable opportunities established in conversation: six. The other four were outside the accepted scope.
- Consultations held: three. One planning service offered; no acceptance recorded yet. No building contracts signed.

Would you announce that \$75 leads were a success? Would you call the campaign a failure because there were no contracts? I would first ask what happened to the seven enquiries with no recorded attempt. The builder may have called from a personal phone or received a text that

never reached the CRM. Check the history with the person responsible before deciding those people were ignored. We cannot judge project fit from an empty record.

The decision is to establish what happened and fix response ownership before raising the budget. Update the seven records from the actual conversations, then give any genuinely unhandled enquiries to the responsible person, with their history and the appropriate contact permission. At the next review, check their next actions and whether new enquiries received the agreed response. Keep the same enquiries in the record so you can follow their eventual outcome.

Your coordinator can assemble this scorecard. Your specialist can explain delivery and traffic. The owner brings the project economics and makes the spending decision. That is a much better meeting than watching someone scroll through a dashboard while you try to work out whether you should be pleased.

Decide, delegate, check

- **Decide:** the signed-work gap, project mix, affordable cash commitment and downside you can carry.
- **Delegate:** ask the person who knows your accounts and enquiry records to assemble the inputs, with clear definitions and dates.
- **Check:** choose one decision from the scorecard and record its owner and review date. Revisit the forecast as real outcomes replace assumptions.

Put this chapter to work

Write down your target work, project mix and conversion assumptions. Use the worked example in this chapter, then add your other costs and cash timing.

The companion marketing budget calculator is being prepared. You can see its purpose at bestknownbuilder.com/resources/numbers; downloads will open with the reader library.