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Digital Support for
Nova Scotia's Tourism Sector

The Leaky Bucket: Why Customers Disappear and How to Fix It

October 15, 2026

TOURISM NOVA SCOTIA

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PRESENTER



BLUE COW MARKETING

Shaun Whynacht

Shaun Whynacht is the founder and Head Marketing Strategist of Blue Cow Marketing Inc. in New Minas, Nova Scotia, and the author of The Leaky Bucket: Why Customers Disappear and How to Build a Business That Makes Them Stay.

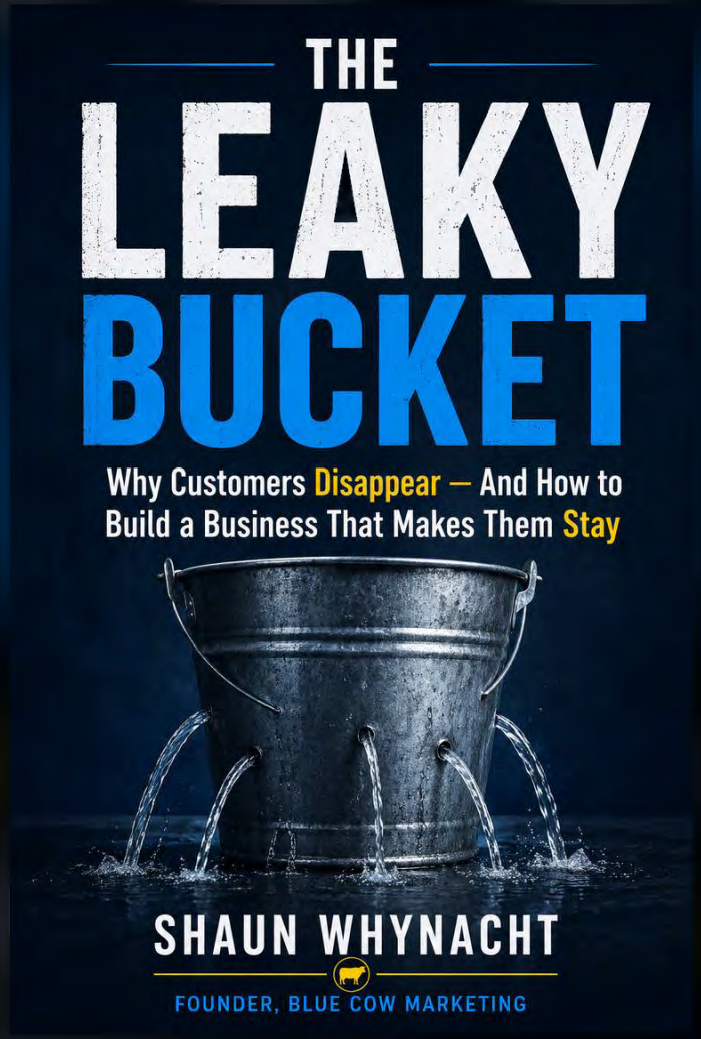
For more than 20 years in digital marketing across Canada and the US, he has helped small businesses replace scattered, manual follow-up with designed customer journeys - CRM, automated nurture, and referral systems that run consistently without losing the human tone. He hosts The Automation Show podcast, teaches regularly for chambers of commerce and business associations across Nova Scotia, and was recognized by the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 2026 for entrepreneurship and community education.

THE LEAKY BUCKET

Why Customers Disappear

A 60-minute workshop on the guest journey most tourism businesses never designed — and how to fix it.

Shaun Whynacht | Blue Cow Marketing



“

You are answering, posting, following up and nudging. And your growth is still slow, flat, unpredictable, exhausting.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

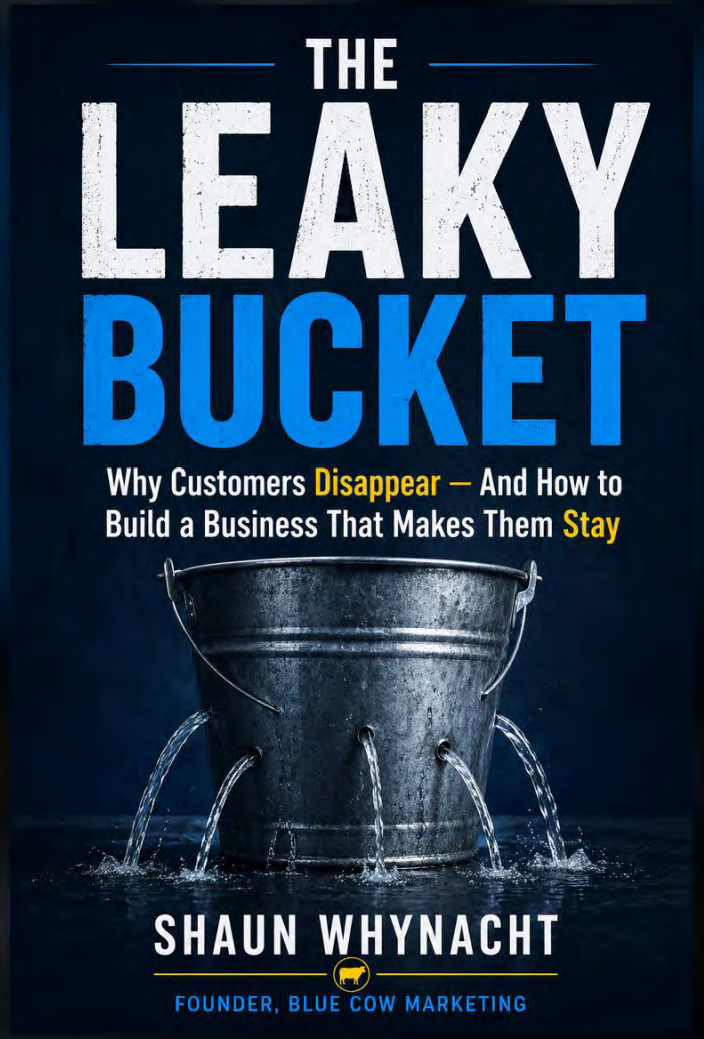
Where We're Going

01	The Bucket	Why more marketing isn't working
02	The Six Holes	Where customers quietly slip out
03	The Patch Kit	The five systems that close them
04	Your First Patch	You leave with a one-page plan

SECTION

Why I Wrote The Book

It started with one uncomfortable hour.



Fifteen Years of the Same Pattern

01

Blue Cow Marketing

Founded in Coldbrook, Nova Scotia. Small businesses, real budgets.

THE SHOP

02

Journeys, Not Ads

CRM, automation and follow-up systems that run without you.

THE WORK

03

Dozens of Industries

Inns, tours, trades, coaches, clinics. Same holes every time.

THE PATTERN

MEET PAUL

He came to me thinking he had a marketing problem.

Eight years in business. Great trips. Twenty-something five-star reviews. Exhausted and not making enough money.



I Never Asked About His Marketing

I spent an hour asking Paul questions. Not about his ads, his website or his posting schedule. About his customers, and what actually happened to them.

How did they find you?

He could not answer for his last five groups.

What happened after?

A great paddle, a card tap, and silence.

Who referred you, and why?

It happened sometimes. By luck, never by design.

“

Paul wasn't bad at marketing. He was bad at keeping. And those are two completely different problems.

— THE REASON THIS BOOK EXISTS

THE SPLIT

Getting customers is marketing. Keeping them is a system.

Most small businesses are reasonably good at the first one and have never deliberately built the second.

SECTION

Meet the Bucket



SECTION

Meet the Bucket



What happens when there are leaks?



THE BUCKET

Pouring faster does not fill a leaking bucket.

It just makes the leak look more manageable for a little while.



What We Do When It Gets Quiet

01
Boost the Budget

More spend into the same leaking journey.

02
Add Another Listing

Another OTA or directory. Same leaks after the click.

03
Run a Promotion

A temporary bump, then straight back to flat — but more tired.

None of This Looks Like Failure

Businesses that are bad at keeping usually deliver decent work. Their customers aren't angry. They're just not coming back, not referring, not staying close.

Great, then gone

A wonderful stay, then never hears from you again.

Answered, but slow

An availability question answered late, or with no next step.

Confirmed by receipt

New guests get a payment confirmation and directions. That's it.



The Bucket Diagnostic

Be honest

Three questions that tell you whether you have a water problem or a bucket problem.



Question 1

Of the guests who visited two years ago, what percentage have come back or sent someone since?

Question 2

If someone found you on Google tonight and you weren't there to answer, could they confidently book?

Question 3

When was your last referral — and did it happen because you built a system, or because it just happened?

The Five-Stage Journey

1

Awareness

They discover you exist

2

Consideration

They quietly research you

3

Conversion

Inquiry to booking

4

Experience

Booking through the visit

5

Loyalty

Return, refer — or vanish

Your customer journey already exists. The only question is whether you designed it, or whether it just happened.

WHERE THE LEAKS LIVE

You market Stage 1. You leak in 2, 4 and 5.

Consideration, Experience and Loyalty. The three stages almost nobody has a plan for.



SECTION

The Six Holes

Where the water actually leaves.



Before They Buy

01

Invisible Evaluation

They research you privately and quietly decide against you.

STAGE 2

02

The Slow Response

They reach out, and someone else replies first.

STAGE 3

03

The Empty Welcome

They book, then hear nothing while doubt grows.

STAGE 3–4

After They Buy

04

The Awkward Middle

The relationship quietly unravels in plain sight.

STAGE 4

05

Missed Second Sale

No next rung, no referral ask, no system.

STAGE 5

06

Exit With No Door

Customers go quiet and nothing ever brings them back.

STAGE 5

HOLE #1

The Invisible Evaluation

It happens on their phone, at an hour when you're not working.

Dana's Ads Were Fine



The leak

Great ads landing on a page about the winery's history, not the visit.

The patch

Homepage led with the visit. Fresh, answered reviews. A clear 'Book a tasting' button.

The result

Tasting bookings improved within two weeks. The ads never changed.

DANA

Annapolis Valley winery. Busy tasting room, loyal locals, eight months of ads.

8 mo

Of paid ads pointed at a leaking page

THE SILENT LOSS

For every person who reaches out, how many looked and left?

You will never know the exact number. It is always more than you think.



The Three Silent Questions

01

Do you get my problem?

They need to feel recognised, not impressed. Their words, not your credentials.

RECOGNITION

02

Can I trust you to fix it?

A sparse presence doesn't just fail to build trust. It actively creates doubt.

CREDIBILITY

03

What do I do next?

A yes to both still drifts away without one obvious, low-friction step.

CLARITY

Five Things They Check

Website

above the fold

Their problem, or your history?

Google

photos & hours

Current photos, hours and season dates?

Social

last 30 days

Who you help, not what you sell.

Reviews

TripAdvisor

Recent, and answered by you?

POLL #2: Search your business name plus 'Nova Scotia' right now. Would a stranger have enough to confidently book?

Failing vs. Passing the Evaluation

LEAKING

Homepage about you
Stale reviews
Bio lists your features
No obvious next step

PATCHED

Homepage about their problem
A review in the last 60 days
Bio names who you help
One clear, easy action

FIXED IN AN AFTERNOON

HOLE #2

The Slow Response

Where leads quietly go to die.

Marcus Lost a Wedding



The leak

A form on Thursday. A short reply Friday. A phone call Monday.

The patch

An instant warm auto-reply with a booking link, plus a personal call before noon next day.

The result

Enquiry conversion up within a month. He never got better at selling.

MARCUS

Restored-barn wedding and event venue. Weddings, reunions, referral-heavy.

40 min

The response time that beat him

THE
RESEARCH

The first business to respond well wins the client about half the time.

Not the cheapest. Not the most experienced. The first one to make the person feel heard.

The First Response Formula

01

Acknowledgement

Confirm you saw their actual message. Kill the 'did anyone see this?' doubt.

MINUTES, NOT DAYS

02

Expectation

Exactly what happens next and when. Better still, a link to book a time.

BE SPECIFIC

03

Something to Do Now

A sample itinerary, FAQ or area guide. Keeps them warm and signals you're organised.

STAY WARM

Two Changes Marcus Made

BEFORE

Sees the form when he can
Replies in 1–3 days
'We'll be in touch soon'
Phone tag to book

AFTER

Auto-reply in seconds
Human follow-up before noon
A specific next step
Booking link in the email

NO EXCEPTIONS RULE

HOLE #3

The Empty Welcome

The first 72 hours decide everything.

THE PSYCHOLOGY

Doubt arrives right after the yes. Silence feeds it.

Your new customer is asking 'did I make the right call?' — and it won't wait for you to be ready.



Beth's Guests Arrived Cold



The leak

A booking confirmation, then silence until directions two days before arrival.

The patch

Five pre-arrival emails in her own voice, written in one weekend, triggered automatically.

The result

Return bookings and referrals both improved. Her review scores were already high.

BETH

Nine-room inn, South Shore Nova Scotia. Outstanding reviews, low return rate.

5

Pre-arrival touches the competitor had

The 72-Hour Welcome

1 Confirm — A welcome, not a receipt

› **2 Orient** — What to expect and prepare

› **3 Quick Win** — Value before they arrive

› **4 Check In** — Questions? Not a sales message

› **5 Celebrate** — A gesture they'll talk about

A warm welcome doesn't just feel good. It changes the lens through which they experience everything that follows.

“

Automation and warmth are not opposites. The warmth is in the writing. The consistency is in the system.

— THE BEAUTIFUL LIE ABOUT AUTOMATION

Map the First Half

Four minutes

Only the part before they book. Holes 1, 2 and 3. Write what actually happens, not what you intend.

They find you

What does a stranger see in the first ten seconds, and can they see how to book?

They reach out

Who replies, how fast, and what does the reply tell them to do next?

They book

What arrives before they show up? List every touch. If it's one receipt, write that down.

HOLE #4

The Awkward Middle

The drift that happens between visits.

Jen's Eleven Months



The leak

Checkout, a review request, then nothing until next spring's booking email.

The patch

One short note a month: campfire recipes, what's new, a returning-family perk.

The result

Families replied with photos. Returning families booked their sites earlier.

JEN

Family campground and cabins, Cape Breton. Loyal families, slowly slipping away.

11 mo

Between checkout and her next email

The Drift Between Visits

Most customer losses aren't dramatic. They're a slow drift in plain sight — and by the time you notice, it has already happened.

Month 3

Contact becomes a promo blast. Both sides are busy.

Month 9

They're planning next summer's trip. You don't come to mind.

Month 12

They booked somewhere else. Not better — just present.



Why We Default to Silence

01

Guilt

Months of silence makes reaching out feel like it needs an apology first.

SELF-REINFORCING

02

Nothing to Say

If the only message is a deal, staying quiet feels more honest than selling.

THE REAL BLOCKER

03

Good Stays Speak

True, up to a point. Loyalty is not static — it needs maintenance.

THE COMFORTABLE LIE

The Silence Test

Hands up

Three questions about the guests you already have. Same rule as before — honest answers only.



Question 1

When did you last contact a past guest with something useful that wasn't a promotion?

Question 2

Could you name the repeat guests who haven't booked with you this year?

Question 3

Does anything happen automatically after checkout? Anything at all?

The Nurture Formula

01

One Useful Insight

Real knowledge from your expertise. Not a platitude, not a repost.

20 MIN TO WRITE

02

One Real Story

A guest moment, a local discovery, a mistake you made. Stories make it stick.

MAKES IT LAND

03

One Soft Mention

Only if it genuinely connects. The kind of thing you'd say in conversation.

NEVER A PITCH

The 90-Day Nurture Calendar

1

Month 1

Personal thank-you + value email one

›

2

Month 2

Value email two + what's new this season

›

3

Month 3

Value email three + a soft referral ask

›

4

Repeat

The calendar resets while they're in your world

›

5

One Rule

Never automate the thank-you

Six emails, written in one Saturday morning in the off-season. That's what a year of staying close actually costs.

Silence vs. Presence

LEAKING

Contact only for promos
A newsletter nobody opens
Apologising for the silence
Next season starts cold

›

PATCHED

One useful note a month
A story they actually read
Nothing to apologise for
They plan next year with you

WRITTEN IN A MORNING

The Missed Second Sale

Most businesses have more to offer than customers know about, and never present it at the moment the customer is most likely to say yes.

The right ask

'If you know anyone' is vague. Name exactly who you want.

The right moment

Peak satisfaction — right after they say 'I wish I'd done this sooner.'

Made easy

A sentence they can forward. Not a form. Not a favour that costs them time.



THE MATH

Five times more expensive to find one than to keep one.

An hour spent on a past guest usually earns more than an hour spent finding a new one.



Paul's Second Sale



The leak

A perfect half-day paddle, a card tap, and no next trip ever offered.

The patch

A next-trip card at the take-out, and a specific referral ask ten days after they get home.

The result

Guests who used to vanish in September now rebook and send friends.

PAUL

The kayak guide from the start of this session. Four guides, eight years in.

0

Next trips ever offered to a happy group

Building Your Offer Ladder

1 Map

Every way a guest can spend with you

› **2 Next Rung**

The offer that naturally follows each one

› **3 Trigger**

The moment they become ready for it

› **4 Language**

A next step, never a pitch

› **5 Automate**

It goes out every time, not when you remember

Gift cards, add-ons, packages, next year's dates. The ladder should feel like a progression, not a sales push.

The Referral Trigger System

1 The Moment
When they say 'we'll definitely be back'

›

2 Write the Ask
Specific, personal, one line to forward

›

3 Automate It
It fires at that moment, every time

›

4 Acknowledge
Personally, immediately — this earns the next one

›

5 One Soft Retry
Thirty days later, no pressure

Referrals don't come from asking. They come from the right ask, at the right moment, made easy enough to actually do.

The Second Sale Test

Hands up

Three questions about the revenue that is already in the room.



Question 1

Can you name, in one sentence, what a happy guest should book or buy from you next?

Question 2

Do you know the exact moment your guests are most likely to say something glowing?

Question 3

When you last got a referral, did anything you built cause it — or did it just happen?

Ending vs. Continuing

LEAKING

Checkout, then silence
'Tell your friends!'
Asking when you remember
No next visit offered

PATCHED

Next stay offered at checkout
A specific person named
A trigger at peak delight
A ladder they can see

AN HOUR TO SET UP

HOLE #6

The Exit With No Door

What happens when a guest goes quiet.

Beth's November Email



The leak

Several hundred past guests going back a decade. Never written to — it felt presumptuous.

The patch

One warm November email with a small returning-guest thank-you. Not a desperate discount.

The result

It out-opened every promotion she'd ever sent. Bookings followed within four weeks.

BETH

The same inn. A decade of happy guests she'd never contacted.

10 yrs

Of past guests she'd never written to

Why It Isn't Presumptuous

01

They Aren't Angry

They drifted because life moved on, not because you failed them.

RECOVERABLE

02

They Meant To

Most lapsed guests always intended to come back. They just didn't.

GLAD TO BE ASKED

03

Relationship, Not Need

Not 'please come back.' Instead: you mattered to us, here's what's new.

THE WHOLE DIFFERENCE

The Re-Engagement Ladder

1 Define
What 'gone quiet' means

›

2 Nudge
Warm, personal, no offer

›

3 Offer
Real value, 1–2 weeks later

›

4 Last Call
Honest, brief — pulls the most replies

›

5 Exit Well
The door stays open

A customer who leaves well is still an asset. They still refer, still speak warmly, still come back when circumstances change.

“

Most guests who drift didn't leave because of a bad stay. They left because nothing kept them close.

— AND THAT IS A RECOVERABLE SITUATION

No Door vs. Door Open

LEAKING

Quiet guests go unnoticed
No threshold for 'dormant'
Too awkward to reach out
The guest list is bookkeeping

PATCHED

A threshold that triggers a sequence
Three touches, then a graceful exit
Warm, specific, low pressure
The guest list is an asset

THE DOOR STAYS OPEN

Booked through a platform? Then they're not on your list yet.

Holes 4, 5 and 6 can only be patched for guests you can actually reach. Capture a direct email, with a reason to give it.



Everything We Just Found

Six holes: three before the booking, three after. Every one has a fix that costs a morning, not a budget.

Before they book

Invisible evaluation. Slow response. Empty welcome.

After they visit

Awkward middle. Missed second sale. Exit with no door.

Pick one

The one that made your stomach drop. Not the easiest one.



Pick One Leak

Five minutes

Not all six. One. The one that made your stomach drop when I described it.

The leak I noticed

Which of the six is costing me the most right now?

The patch I could try

What is the smallest version of the fix I could ship this week?

Owner and date

Who does it, and by when? A leak with no name and no date stays a leak.

SECTION

The Patch Kit

Design it on paper before you build anything.



The Journey Map Canvas

01

What Happens Now

Not what you intend — what your customer actually experiences.

BE HONEST

02

Where the Holes Are

Name which of the six live at which stage. Don't fix anything yet.

JUST NAME THEM

03

The Designed Version

What each stage looks like working well. Realistic, but ambitious.

YOUR BUILD LIST

Five Automation Pillars

1 **Rapid Response**

Closes the Slow Response

2 **Welcome**

Closes the Empty Welcome

3 **Nurture**

Closes the Awkward Middle

4 **Re-Engagement**

Closes the Exit With No Door

5 **Referral Ask**

Closes the Missed Second Sale

Five systems. Not fifty. Each one triggered by an event, written once, running whether you remember it or not.

Four Numbers That Matter

Speed

response time

Minutes from enquiry to reply.

Conversion

booking rate

Inquiries that become bookings.

Pre-arrival

the welcome

Guests who get your welcome.

Retention

return and refer

Past guests who rebook or refer.

Keep the numbers boring, useful and tied to a decision. Vanity metrics can go sit in the kiddie pool.

Accidental vs. Designed

ACCIDENTAL

Replaces the customers it loses
Every year starts over
Growth depends on your energy
Loyalty by luck

DESIGNED

Compounds the customers it wins
Last year's work still pays
Growth runs on systems
Loyalty by design

BUILD THE FLYWHEEL

“

One of these is a hamster wheel. The other is a flywheel. The difference isn't talent or budget — it's intention.

— THE BUSINESS YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO RUN

A lighter business is a build, not a fantasy.

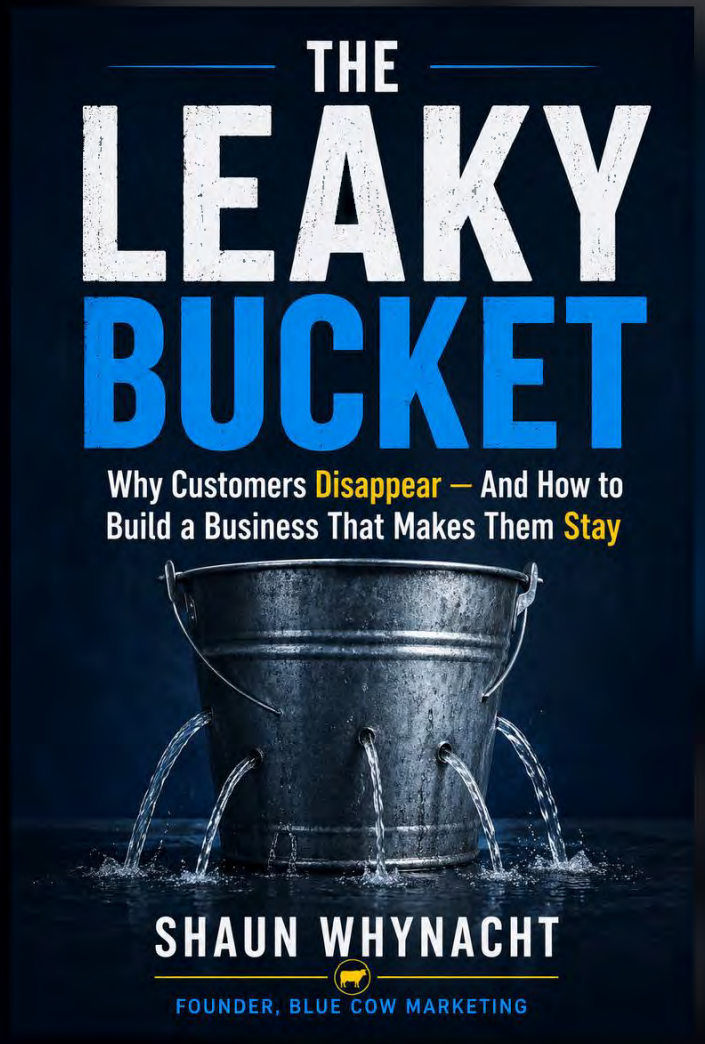
Dana fixed hers in an afternoon. Beth fixed hers in a weekend. Marcus changed two things.



“

Which of the six holes did you recognise fastest? Start there — a hole you can see is a hole you can fix.

bluecowmarketing.ca



Get the book. Find your holes.

You'll get the full book, the 18-question Bucket Audit and the Journey Map Canvas with the replay. Want it now? It's free.

DOWNLOAD THE LEAKY BUCKET

bluecowmarketing.ca/freebook

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November 5, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

From First Click to Commitment:
UX Strategies For Websites That Grow Real Relationships

STEPHANIE FOX
UX
USER EXPERIENCE CONSULTING & TRAINING



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