

The Marketing Secret Widely Known but Rarely Practiced

By J.Norman Sussman

The Marketing Secret Widely Known but Rarely Practiced

J.Norman Sussman
optimalbiz@yahoo.com

Marketing Survival Kit.com <http://www.marketingsurvivalkit.com>

A successful small business marketer is a cross between an eternal optimist and a hard-nosed realist. If you don't cultivate optimism, your efforts will be sporadic, half-hearted, and uncreative.

On the other hand, if you look at the world only through "rose-colored glasses", you may develop a false sense of confidence and plunge blindly into an expensive media blitz, bypassing the necessary planning and evaluation. While optimism is an essential state of mind for pursuing any goal, it needs to be tempered with a dose of realism.

Sometimes a company's worst enemy can be self-defeating attitudes. You know it's time to regroup and re-examine attitudes and your creative process when you hear yourself or one of your associates saying, "I didn't think that ad would work, anyway!" Does that sound familiar? If you ever have serious reservations about an ad, a marketing campaign, or a sales presentation, then it's time to step back, re-evaluate it, and get some outside feedback before launching it.

Second Opinions Don't Just Apply to Your Health

Run the concept, the graphics, or the sales message by some associates, a couple friends, or even family members who are willing to offer some constructive criticism. Ask them what their immediate reaction is and why the sales message is or is not persuasive. Do they think it would compel them to take action if they were prospective customers, or does it just blend in with the hundreds of other marketing messages they're exposed to day after day? Finding a way to stand out and be noticed is often the first hurdle in a successful advertising or marketing campaign.

A more formal approach would be to assemble a focus group, usually members of the public who are paid a fee to view your commercial, evaluate your product, or critique your marketing material. The most effective way to conduct a focus group is generally to hire an experienced advertising agency or marketing research company to do it for you. They should know how to guide discussions in a productive direction and ask questions that elicit unbiased, honest, and useful responses.

If you've invested a lot of your time and thought into creating an ad, a sales presentation, or even the packaging for a product, your closeness to the campaign can make it difficult to put yourself into the customers' shoes. By getting too caught up in the creative process, the pressures of sales quotas, or your own ego, it's easy to lose your objectivity. That's when outside feedback can be really helpful and necessary.

Get In Touch With Your Inner Customer

The easiest and most natural way to start thinking like a customer is to get in the habit of paying attention to and analyzing your own experiences as a customer. Whether you're in a restaurant, a dry cleaners, or a repair shop, make a mental note of the things that rub you the wrong way or that make you want to continue doing business there. The same holds true of your reaction to print ads, commercials, billboards, yellow pages ads, or sales pitches. What is it about some of the marketing messages you hear or see that motivate you to pick up the phone, get in your car, write a check, pull out your credit card, or choose one business over another? Give some thought to why you keep going back to the same coffee shop, chiropractor, mechanic, bank, or hair stylist. If you can figure out why they've earned your loyalty, that might shed some light on how you can improve your own company's ability to attract, acquire, and retain customers.

But before you can build on your strengths, you need to identify exactly what they are. You and just about everyone in your organization needs to know what your unique, distinctive customer advantages are and why customers are better off doing business with your company rather than your competitors. Stop and write down all the strong selling points that can be used in presentations, brochures, ads, business cards, sales letters, and web pages. Then figure out what changes, improvements, and enhancements need to be made to your service quality, your marketing strategy, and that list of advantages to make it more compelling.

Shift Your Focus to Improve Your Profitability

Now here comes the hard part! I'm no psychologist, but it seems like the biggest obstacle that business owners face in giving effective sales presentations and creating response-producing ads and letters is their own ego. Make one change in your attitude and you're almost sure to increase your sales closing ratio and your advertising response rate. The secret, which you and just about everyone else in business has heard of but may not have acted on, is to focus your marketing message on "benefits" rather than "features". In other words, customers are more strongly persuaded by knowing how a product is going to benefit them, rather than what it's made of. That doesn't mean you should leave out the descriptive features of your product or service; but, in most cases, the main thrust of your presentation or ad should be the benefits your customer will enjoy. More specifically, focus on your ability to solve their problem, make their lives easier, or help them feel happier, have more fun, be more confident, enjoy better health, or increase their family's safety. They may also be in the market for a product or service that makes them more financially secure, personally admired or loved, more attractive, prosperous, prestigious, comfortable, or pain free. People have dozens of fundamental needs and emotional triggers, and are motivated by everything from fear and greed to love and vanity. If possible, find out exactly what your prospects' "hot buttons" are, and then tailor your presentation, ad, or web page to those needs. If you can reach them at an emotional level or otherwise convince them that you can satisfy their needs or solve their problem better than the competition, then the probability of gaining their business and winning them over as a loyal client will increase tremendously. Do that consistently, and you'll have a winning formula for small business marketing success.

Joel Sussman, president of Optimal Marketing Communications, has created a web site, called "Marketing Survival Kit.com" <http://www.marketingsurvivalkit.com> .The site features a variety of hand-picked articles, small business marketing tools, and downloadable manuals. A free subscription to his marketing newsletter is available by sending a blank email to <mailto:marketingsurvivalkit@GO-Subscribe.com>

© Copyright 2003 by Optimal Marketing Communications

Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)