

Dropped Jaw Syndrome, Your Fastest, Most Reliable Market Test

By Lynella Grant

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Business owners should be more like doctors.

Forget selling and start asking your customers where they hurt. Broken leg? Ulcer? Empty wallet?

Don't sell, diagnose. And what are you as a doctor looking for? Well, of course: that ever-illusory, yet ever-profitable disease called Dropped Jaw Syndrome.

OK, it may not be in any medical book. But Dropped Jaw Syndrome, however rare, is known to anyone who's ever tried to sell something. The customer walks into your store, listens to your pitch and falls into an awestruck trance. "I'll take three of them."

Joking aside, the dropped jaw, or at least its symptoms, are the fuel behind every sale. When a customer is persuaded to buy, their reaction isn't logical. You've connected with the part of their brain that decides if you and your product are believable, the limbic system. Sure, you still need to persuade with facts, but logic is a distant second to their desire to buy, their reflexive dropping jaw.

Diagnosing Dropped Jaw

The key is finding the dropped jaw, tracking the symptoms back to their source. But it's there. And it's quite easy to find once you stop thinking about your product for a moment and focus on the customer... I mean, patient.

Don't believe me? Well, put on a white coat, hang a stethoscope around your neck and do some market tests of your own. But this is a test you have to do face to face. Forget the demographic studies, sales plans and benchmark reports, and get in front of a customer.

Now, take his temperature, make your pitch. And follow it through the customer's reaction.

Did his jaw drop? Hmm. You must have done something wrong. Try again, but listen like a doctor searching for a heart murmur. Ask a question, offer information, and then hear the subtleties of his response. And when you're diagnosing a customer, instead of trying to sell your product, something changes.

You become more attuned to the subtle dropped jaw and related body language. And you ask more accurate questions. You notice which of the claims and benefits penetrate the customer's protective indifference, sparking real interest. Of course, most salespeople already do this to a degree, but it must be done intentionally, consciously.

The true advantage of Dropped Jaw Syndrome comes from changing your role for a moment, from selling and telling to assessing what customers want, even when they can't say it in words. Demand that you live up to their desires. Because if you're not dropping jaws, you're in danger of falling behind the competition. Worse, you're probably overlooking your company's uniqueness.

Diagnosing Your Pitch

In searching for dropped-jaw reactions, some companies have made unbelievable claims central to their promotions. We've all seen the TV commercials where "Crazy Joe" says he's so insane he's practically giving away the furniture in his store.

Better are claims that are striking and stand out from the competition, but don't over-promise. Consider "Have it your way" (Burger King) or "It takes a licking and keeps on ticking" (Timex). In establishing your own unique proposition, the dropped jaw test is quick and reliable.

Customers, whether they know it or not, are very good at distinguishing between businesses they trust and those they don't. Let them tell you how you're doing.

Building Customer Confidence

I discovered the Dropped Jaw Syndrome years ago. It started with my claim that I can assess the health of a business by looking only at its business card. And when I would point out the subtle messages on their cards, most of them unintended, people's jaws would drop.

The value of the dropped jaw test is the perspective it imparts. By listening to the customer or putting yourself in

her shoes, you're more likely to notice the "small potatoes" signals you're sending. Such telltale signs aren't based on the business size or age. But once you recognize them they can be easily repaired.

As you play doctor, it's your job to notice what hurts the customer and cure it. When you find ways to make your customers jaws drop, you'll take their pain away. And that will make your business a healthy one.

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