

SIX KEYS TO COMMON SENSE MARKETING

#4 Better Marketing = Less Selling

The fourth key to common sense marketing recognizes that better marketing equals less selling. What this means is that *if* you:

- have identified the target market whose needs are a fit to your strengths;
- know who those people are and what makes them tick;
- have figured out how to reach them so that you are top-of-mind at the time they are making their buying decisions; and,
- have developed a message that is meaningful to them,

then the amount of effort you have to spend on selling, in the traditional sense, is minimal. In other words, with a strong marketing strategy, your days of cold calling for new business are probably numbered.

This is good news for many small business owners. Interestingly enough, a lot of entrepreneurs, both successful and unsuccessful, are introverts. These are not people who 'live to sell'. Rather, they are more likely to be people who 'sell to live'. Quite often they got into business because there was a particular thing they were good at or really enjoyed doing: the bookkeeper who is a numbers whiz; the seamstress who adores sewing; or the fitness centre owner who can't get enough exercise. The 'hard sell' wasn't a part of their dream package - and it's probably not part of yours.

It's important to know that marketing and selling are not the same thing, although they are often discussed as if they are. In fact, there are fundamental differences between the two. Marketing is all about strategy, two-way communication and forming a relationship with customers. You learn about your target market, what they want and need, and then you try to match everything about your business as closely as possible to those wants and needs while staying true to your own strengths, principles and goals.

Selling, on the other hand, is an activity. I present you with my product or service and you decide whether or not you want to buy it. Many would argue that it's not quite as simple as that but the fact is that marketing is much more multi-dimensional than sales.

When you look at marketing as a way of developing a relationship with your customers, you can see that good marketing involves finding a way to effectively communicate with them. So, for all you introverts out there who find it difficult to "push" your product or service and feel you just can't sell, relax! Concentrate on communication and on finding common ground.

The fear of rejection

For many people, even communication can be scary when there's a risk that the person we're talking with might reject us. This is as true in business communication as it is in personal. It is not unusual for us to have difficulty separating the things that we say and do, our business, our products and services, from our selves. What this means is that when you are attempting to communicate the value of what you offer to someone else, and there's a chance they are going to say they don't want it, you get nervous. If they reject what you're offering, *you'll* feel rejected too and that will make you unhappy. It's a rare person who chooses to be unhappy.

Fear of rejection is said to be the number one human fear. It is the reason that things go unspoken in all manner of relationships - including those between a business person and a potential customer. Even if you happen to be an extrovert, you may find it difficult to put yourself on the line and risk rejection. It has nothing to do with whether or not you believe in your product or service. It has everything to do with offering a piece of yourself to another person who may turn it down.

The good news is that if you've done your homework, and you have strong evidence that the person you're approaching needs and/or can benefit from your products and services, the odds of you being rejected are considerably reduced. Still, there's a chance. What if... they say no? No one likes to face rejection. In order to be successful in business, though, you have to learn not to take the 'no's' personally. Maybe there wasn't a match after all. Or maybe there's a better way to communicate. Either way, you're still intact and will live to tell the tale. Better yet, you have some new information that you can use to evaluate and improve your marketing.

It is the inability to separate objective reality from emotion that immobilizes many people and keeps them from communicating effectively with potential customers. Always remember, you are not a failure because someone doesn't want to buy from you in any given instance. If you believe that you are, though, your fear of rejection can overwhelm you. It can become so consuming that it begins to colour all of your communication.

You might find yourself subconsciously giving up before you've started, asking why you'd even bother approaching potential customers when you know they're going to say no. Or, when you do approach them, you might lose your focus, get distracted, begin to mumble, forget that you're just trying to communicate a match between a benefit and a need - and render yourself ineffective.

You don't go into business for that kind of torture or stress. Wrapped up in a nice little package, now you're dealing with, not only a specific fear of rejection, but:

- fear of failure;
- poor self image/lack of confidence;
- a fear of criticism; and
- presentation anxiety

When our fears take hold of us we may revert to procrastination. Have you ever put off calling a potential customer by telling yourself: "I'll call later - it's too early (it's lunch time or it's too late in the day). It's just not a good time to talk to them; they probably aren't in a very good mood. Next week will be better..."?

When you take a step back from all this it can seem a little silly, can't it? How could the simple act of communicating information that you believe will only be helpful to another person, create so much dysfunction? Let's look at an example.

Lisa Smith just loves miniature dogs. It was this love that led her to open "Little Daisies", a successful online store specializing in supplying the owners of tiny pets with teensy-weensy, little outfits and other supplies. After four years of robust online sales, Lisa feels she is ready to tackle the retail market. She wants to open her first 'real' store in Vancouver, in an area that is highly populated with small pets - an area where she believes demand for her products will be high.

Lisa reviews her sales records and does a considerable amount of market research to discover that Vancouver's Yaletown district houses a large number of small pets and their owners. Perfect, she thinks, deciding to go for it and follow through on her plans to open a retail store. She finds a bright storefront space and sets up shop, only to discover a few days later that there are two other pet stores in the neighbourhood.

Suddenly, what seemed like the perfect location now seems 'iffy' at best. Lisa is having second thoughts, wondering if there really is a market for her store after all. Dejected, she believes she may have been wrong to expand.

A few curious potential customers come into Lisa's store and she smiles at them, secretly afraid to engage in conversation for fear they will turn right around and leave. And, in fact, they do leave, not because she spoke to them, but because she didn't. Fred, down the street is much more welcoming. He likes to chat with people about their pets and, although he doesn't have the little extras that the miniatures' owners are looking for, he makes them feel important and appreciated.

Lucky for Lisa, Fred is a good guy. He has more than enough business and knows that Lisa runs a specialty shop that is no threat to his own much larger pet supply store. He goes to see Lisa, compliments her on the great concept she has and encourages her to put out a neighbourhood flyer letting people know what she has to offer them. Fred suggests that Lisa include in there a reference to the Little Daisy online store because many of the local residents have likely already purchased from her there.

Lisa is very grateful for Fred's help but says that she thinks maybe she should wait awhile to get established before she starts putting out flyers. In truth, she dreads doing any kind of formal advertising in case it confirms that there really is no market for her in Yaletown. She even questions Fred's motives, thinking that maybe he's encouraging her, just to watch her fail.

Lisa doesn't put the flyer out. With the same certainty she once had that her retail business would succeed, she is now convinced that it will fail. And that's just what would have happened, were it not for Fred who, seeing Lisa's shop as complementary to his own, refers many customers to her as a part of his own customer service. These are customers that would have otherwise never known Lisa was there.

Mastering the art of communication

How do you master the art of the customer communication? First, you have to identify and come to understand the potential customers whose wants and needs closely match what is best about your products and services. Once that's done, all that remains is to communicate the match. 'Selling' becomes easy and effortless because you're talking to people whose best interests lie in what you are selling. Rejection is minimized. You get enough successes under your belt to feel confident in your communication.

Targeting the right audience is the best way to overcome fears of business failure. A couple of tricks you can use to ease the way include:

- **Thinking optimistically.** Fortunately, entrepreneurs tend to be an optimistic bunch and research has shown that people who are optimistic generally outsell and outperform their pessimistic cousins. Sadly, pessimists often view themselves as realistic - completely justified in what can be an overly cautious and fearful approach to communication. Pessimists give up quicker and miss opportunities that can lead to success.
- **Understanding the nature of communication.** It is a creative process. Good communicators know that in order to be successful they must be receptive to different circumstances, personalities and information. They must be flexible and, yes, creative, in tailoring their message to the audience so that it will be heard. Whether that message comes through telephone calls, advertising, signage, displays, written presentations or slide shows, it's important that it be framed in a way that is meaningful to the audience. How can you set the stage so the connection is made? It can be very challenging - and also a lot of fun.

A few other tips for effective communication with potential customers are:

- Build long-term relationships with your existing clients who will provide repeat business, good references and referrals.
- Develop your ability to speak clearly and sincerely about your product or service.
- Know your products and services inside and out and understand what makes them unique and desirable to your target market.
- Seek out mentors who have an affinity for business development. Model them.
- Become a very good listener - successful communicators listen to and understand the needs of their customers.
- Learn how to handle rejection.
- Know what to say when a customer asks why they should buy.
- Be able to close a sale.

Don't let the fear of rejection hold you back from communicating with your customers. When done effectively, it can have a huge impact on your sales revenue. Such a simple thing - but still so critical to making those connections and forming the customer relationships that lead to success. And isn't *connected* and *successful* exactly where you want to be?

Next month: Marketing Key #5: Be Customer Focused.

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