

# Who is helping you to help others?

Organizations that deal with the public typically have one or more frontline people. These people deal directly with the public, perhaps by giving directions, meeting and greeting or assisting in some way. Many times, these frontline people are also some of the least well compensated in the organization. But they are crucial in shaping how the public perceives the organization.

Have you ever walked into an office where the receptionist didn't even bother to greet you? Have you stood waiting for help at a "customer service" booth? Then you know that your interaction with people that are supposed to assist you can color how you perceive the organization that they represent. However, many organizations don't seem to grasp this simple concept and continue to deploy people in "helping" positions that are unwilling or unable to help, therefore damaging the credibility and perception of the organization.

**Here's a tip: if you are hiring someone to help you to deal with the public make sure that persons LIKES helping people.**

On my last trip, I had trouble checking in on the kiosk. So, a very unhelpful, surly guy came over, growled at me and told me to go wait in line. He was absolutely rude and unpleasant. Do you think that makes me feel positive toward the airline in question?

Yesterday, I was in downtown DC to meet with a client. She had her laptop with her and we needed to go somewhere with WiFi. I couldn't think where the nearest Cosi was, but DC has deployed Downtown DC people in the Gallery Place area. I went up a woman with the Downtown DC jacket and asked her if she knew where the nearest Cosi was. She did. She gave us specific,

perfect directions. She was helpful (and right). Contrast that with an exchange I had witnessed earlier inside a Metro station. A gentleman had approached the booth to ask a question, and the lady in the booth was BERATING him for tapping on her window. Does that make Metro look helpful? (BTW, I have had similar experiences with people in the booths...they just don't want to be bothered to do their jobs, that is, assisting people.)

As a marketing consultant, I can advise you to take a good look at who is dealing with public in your organization. These people are crucial because they create the first (and maybe the only) impression the public will have of your organization.

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## **The number 1 marketing tip**

Are you trying to sell something? A product or a service? You probably are if you are reading this post, and my blog generally. You want more people to know about what you do, what you produce, what you sell. That is the entire point of any marketing communications effort.

However, beyond your product brochure, your social media strategy and your web page lies something much more important in your quest to sell: what it is that you are selling, exactly. Are you selling a product? If so, what is that product? What makes it good? What gives it the edge over other similar products in the marketplace? Are you providing a service? What does that service do for the customer? Why does the customer need that service?

I bring these questions up because the number one marketing tip is this:

## **Know your product or service.**

If you don't, you will not be able to sell it to anyone. Period.

Let me give you an example. I was shopping for mascara the other day at a department store cosmetics counter. I wear contact lenses so mascaras that flake are not an option, since it would make my eyes water. I had been buying one particular type but wanted to try something different. I asked the saleswoman about several different types. She could not explain what the differences were, and whether they would be suitable for me other than to assure me that they would be fine. I was not convinced because she did not seem to understand her product. I ended up buying the same old product because I knew it. She did not sell me. And the reason she did not sell me is because she simply did not know her product.

I don't care if you are selling mascara or high end real estate. If you don't know what you are selling people will not buy it. It really is that simple.

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## **Slogans have impact**

We know of course that a good slogan or tagline is key in helping to make a business stand out. Slogans should be short and sweet and descriptive. Many slogans lack this last one: descriptive. They may be short and sweet, and maybe even clever, but they don't say anything.

I came across this wonderful blog entry in Budget Travel's blog about travel slogans. The post talks about some memorable slogans such as "Virginia is For Lovers" and other not so memorable ones. The author talks about many of the Central

American tourism slogans that just don't seem to translate. El Salvador uses "Impressive!" and Guatemala uses "The Soul of the Earth."

In any case, let this be an example about why you should choose your slogan carefully. Although brevity is good, description is better. What do you do? What makes you special? (The answer to this is never that you are unique...as I have said before few things are unique).

Do you have examples of slogans that you just love? Or that you just hate? Please share!

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## **You only have one chance to make a first impression**

Yesterday, I attended a networking/information lunch put on by a group to which I had never been before. The topic was business strategies. This was the fall kick-off event and I thought it was a good time to think about strategy as I move forward with my business and so forth. Well, the speaker was more interested in telling us about how he doesn't take clients under \$20,000. He made the point that we should think about doing strategy and not tactics. No word about how to develop strategies for your business. He also took a bunch of self-centered questions from the audience. In a word, the event was disappointing. Not to mention expensive and not very satisfying.

The group put out a survey and I gladly responded that the event did not meet my expectations and why. The organizer wrote me and said that "he had no control over the speaker" even though he agreed with me about content. He asked me to

give the group another chance.

Here are my thoughts.

1) Organizers do have some control over the speaker. It is not total of course, but the organizer could have reminded the speaker of the topic, and OUTLINED EXPECTATIONS FROM THE SPEECH, QUESTIONS AND TOPIC TO BE COVERED.

2) It is not enough to ask me to try again. It was money out of my pocket, and perhaps he could have offered a discount for next time or something such.

3) The organizer needs to be aware that you only get one chance to make a first impression. If you don't make a good first impression, YOU MUST make a better second impression or else all is lost. My second impression is that the organizer doesn't get it. He did not take full responsibility. Etc.

Oh, and when I arrived at the event, there was no name tag for me, even though I pre-registered. Nothing irritates me more at these types of events than having a handwritten Hello, I am... tag. Awful. My handwriting is not that clear and I think it looks unprofessional.

Ironically, this group is a public relations related group. What is the saying about doctors healing themselves?

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## The value of a title

We've all heard of MDs, MBAs, and PhDs. We usually deal with a CPA once a year. I don't have to tell you what these stand for. You know. You are familiar with them, and therefore you understand their value. What about MPS? Do you know what that is? I don't. The point is that titles are important, but only

if you know what they mean.

Would you go to a doctor that didn't have a MD after his or her name? Probably not. MD stands for medical doctor. You may need to go to a PsyD, which is a doctor of psychology. You may want your lawyer to be a JD and he or she probably uses the abbreviation to Esquire in his/her cards.

There are some titles that are obscure, like the MPS. Does it mean anything at first glance? Probably only to those who have it. MP, on the other hand, stands for Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, which may be a pretty important title. Some organizations, such as the IABC (International Association of Business Communicators) and the PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) issue certificates like the ABC and APR respectively. The problem is that no one outside of a small circle knows what it means. In fact, you can be a business communicator or a public relations practitioner WITHOUT being accredited. On the other hand, you cannot practice medicine legally without your proper degree.

My point is that we all like titles. In fact, some cultures love titles. However, if you are going to use them as a marketing point, you better be sure that people know what the title is and what it stands for. I got an invitation to an event where the speaker is the aforementioned "MPS." Am I supposed to be impressed? I don't even know what it stands for!

Anybody have a title they have seen and don't know what it is?

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# A reason to buy (plus photographs)

Perhaps I should have titled this blog post “Back to Basics,” because it is all about hitting the essential notes. When marketing anything, you need to show the potential buyer why he or she would want to buy something. Seems fairly obvious. And yet, how many times have you seen products advertised for which there is no clear reason given that would cause buyers to buy?

I got the following anecdote from Sara Cormeny (who is a web developer at [www.paperlantern.com](http://www.paperlantern.com). )Please note I edited slightly:

I just recently purchased a product on Amazon called the Standers Bed Cane, for my dad. It's a handle that you attach to the side of your bed, in order to have something secure and sturdy to hold onto as you get in and out of bed.

For people who are still having a hard time convincing a parent to get one, I noticed that they have cleverly added an organizer pouch, useful for holding glasses, the remote control, a pen, etc. More than one of the Amazon user reviews mentioned that her mom was willing to consider the Bed Cane because she actually thought the organizer was worth it, even if she insisted that she didn't need one of those cane-assists.

I thought it was really clever that the makers added this to the product – now it appeals to both parties who are likely to be involved in the buying process, and lets the user save face with a product that screams “old lady who can't get in and out of bed on her own.”

I was also impressed that the seller included five photos

of the product, which were clearly taken and showed it in use with a person in the bed, in a close-up attached to the bed without a person, and two photos of it removed from the bed so you could see all the parts and see it folded up for storage. For me, all the photos made it so much easier to understand how it would work and how it would fit with my parents' bed, and that was really what sold me (along with the competitive price)."

What Sara is pointing is that there should be COMPELLING reason to buy and also proof, in the way of pictures, that the product serves the purpose. Any marketing should include these basics. Advertising and marketing should not always leave everything to the imagination. Being clear and transparent is often the way to go (more on this on my next post).

Thoughts? Have you bought something because the photographs made it clear how the product worked?

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## Strategy vs. Tactics

I came across this blog post from copywriter Tim Brunelle regarding tired tactics, and how sometimes strategy is ignored. That got me thinking about the topic. Usually each piece of marketing material is a tactic: the brochure, the press release, even the website. Hopefully, each piece is guided by a strategy.

If you are launching a marketing campaign, it should never start with "we'll run an ad." It should start with figuring out who you want to reach, where those people are located and what you want them to do with the information you want to share with them.



A few months ago, a potential client contacted me. He wanted me to write copy for an ad. He was about to open up a new business and wanted to promote it. My first thought was “wait a second, what?.” I asked him who his target audience was. He told me. I asked him where this ad would run. He told me he thought it should run in one of those free newspapers so common on the subway. I asked why. His reasoning was lots of people read that (true) and the cost is relatively low (true). But what this guy was missing completely was a strategy, a vision, a long term plan. Sure, running a “cheap” ad in a mass publication could promote your business. But spending a few dollars here and few dollars there does not further your purpose and it certainly does not strengthen your brand. In fact, you have to think about the larger picture to create a brand personality and make sure that you are not hurting yourself with some misplaced tactics.

People are sold tactics by ad sales reps because those reps are there to sell advertising now and not to tell you how to create a brand image for yourself. Many times, small businesses fall into this trap. The local paper will call and tell them they are running a special and so forth. It sounds reasonable. And boom, a tactic is launched which may or may not have something to do with your larger strategy.

Save yourself some marketing dollars and think of each tactic as a piece of the marketing strategy puzzle. Instead of blindly following some promotion because it is inexpensive, figure out whether that furthers your overall goals.

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# JetBlue sells out ... in a good way

Did you hear about JetBlue's unlimited pass? For \$599 you can go anywhere during a month. You probably already heard about it, but now you can no longer get the pass because it is sold out. That's right, in just about a week, JetBlue was able to create so much demand that it was able to sell out. To me, that is the definition of a great marketing campaign.

Why is this such a great marketing campaign? For many reasons:

- First and foremost it **sold product**, in this case, seats on planes.
- It was **creative** and different from most airline promotions. It caused JetBlue to stand apart.
- Its creativity created buzz, and loads of **publicity**. Google is telling me that there were at least 226 articles about the promotion, and 50 articles about the selling out.

JetBlue has tapped into something customers want: lower cost air travel. But its not all about being cheap—Spirit Airlines is also cheap, but it does not offer the same experience. JetBlue is comfortable, offers snacks, TV in each seat, and it's generally a good experience. But it also distinguishes itself for being cutting edge. JetBlue has embraced Twitter by offering their “cheeps” (travel promotions). And its tries hard to provide good customer service.

It is a really good day in marketing when a promotion reaches its target while generating front page news, all for a comparatively low marketing dollar investment.

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# Why a thank you is good marketing



Thank you for reading this post, and thank you for reading my blog. I probably haven't thanked you before, so I apologize, because this post is about how thank you is really a marketing tool.

We've all heard of customer appreciation. Often, it is a deal available to new customers. Sometimes it is a gift with purchase. In many cases, the customer has to do something additional to get appreciated—sign up for a new service or buy more.

What about customers that just use a service, like a gym, cable, phone and have been using it for years. Do they ever get thanked? No, they often don't. Why? Because companies take the bulk of their customer base for granted. They imagine that if they are providing the service, and there is no problem, the customer will remain loyal. But in fact, customers are not always loyal. They will switch for lower prices, or better service. They may also switch because a company does not seem to appreciate they have a choice in service providers. This is why more banks and customer service agents start any conversation with you by saying things like "thank you for banking with us."

The bottom line is that saying thank you is about expressing appreciation. And most everyone likes to be appreciated. And yet, thank yous are sometimes hard to come by.

In your personal marketing or personal branding, saying thank you may be even more important. Think about it: What are you saying when you don't say thank you? You are communicating that you are uninterested, unappreciated, or that you take the gesture for granted. It makes you seem rude and self-involved. Some people will claim they are too busy to respond. Are you too busy to make sure that you are perceived properly?

Remember, no one is forced to be your customer unless you are a monopoly. And no one is required to help you out unless he or she wants to. It is simple to say thank you. Saying thank you boosts the perception that you care, that you are aware that what the customer or friend has given you has some value.

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# New business: marketing essentials

If you are a new business, or a small business, or any business at all, there are a couple essentials for your marketing. I am assuming you already have a business name and have done all the necessary paperwork to get yourself set up.

The number one item you need is a website. Buy your own domain. If you can't afford a fully designed website you can use templates through vendors such as Network Solutions or Go Daddy. If you are more technologically inclined, you can use WordPress, but host it at your domain name. Your website, at minimum, should answer these questions: who are you, what do you do, why should anyone hire you or purchase your product, how to reach you. If you are a restaurant or deal with the public, include your hours and directions to your location. Remember, this is a minimum. If you are a restaurant, you could also include menus. Service businesses could include case studies, client lists, testimonials.

The number two item you need is business cards. You can get them for cheap or you can have them professionally designed. Whatever you do your business cards should have your name, primary phone, website URL and email address (preferably at your domain).

If you have money or a good friend who is a graphic designer, get a logo and letterhead package done.

Once you are set up, you may consider developing a tagline or a slogan for your business. Use it on everything.

These are the essentials. There are plenty of other marketing communications collateral materials you could develop for yourself, including brochures, ads, press releases, white papers and so forth. You also have to think about your social

media strategy: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn for starters.

Start with the essentials. Work from there.

If you want help figuring out what marketing materials you need, contact me.