

The Weekly Dose Success Tip Archive

Understand Market Psychology

To build a better marketing strategy it helps to know some basic business and human psychology. In the business world the marketplace tries to level the playing field. Commoditization is the process of making everything the same. Generally speaking, commodities are bought and sold on the basis of price. When everything is a commodity, price becomes the major differentiating factor. A can of beans is the same from one grocery store to another.

This is especially true when it comes to technical and professional services. Insurance companies, regulatory agencies, and licensing boards which stipulate minimum standards-of-care, all work to “commoditize” the marketplace. A filling is a filling is a filling, and heart surgery here is as good as heart surgery there. How could insurance reimburse the services on any other basis? Generally speaking, a home contractor or brain surgeon is no worse than the minimum standards set by their boards, the courts, or the building inspection department.

While this might be how things work in the big picture of things (it obviously is how the “system” works), it doesn’t apply at the individual level. Nobody in their right mind would brag about saving \$50 on a retinal reattachment procedure because they found a discount coupon for eye surgery in the Giant Nickel classified section. We just don’t go out looking for bargains or discounts in brain surgery, heart bypasses, or parachute packers.

The point is that on the front end nobody seeks to do important business with people who are just average, normal or ordinary. Nobody would on purpose seek out a physician who was below average; everybody’s doctor graduated in the top half of their class. Everybody hires a home decorator who is very talented, and everybody chooses a dentist who is really very good. To admit or hope otherwise would be to admit your own stupidity!

When you understand the marketplace wants equality, but that people individually pride themselves on making intelligent consumer decisions, this knowledge will help you build a marketing strategy that gets you noticed.

How? By realizing that most small business and health professionals DON’T understand this! They are all so busy beating the dead horses of price and quality, that they don’t realize how they can gain advantage through the novel services they offer and how they package themselves and present themselves to the public. They overlook important positioning strategies that will favor them in the minds of the marketplace, in spite of price or a value conscious public!

Get an Attractive Attitude

In the old days, hats were both fashionable and normal business and social dress. While women could get away with extravagance and plumage, men couldn't stray very far from the conservative gray or brown hat. To stand out or be noticed men would often place a feather in their hat. This gave rise to the expression when there was a special talent, skill or accomplishment, that it was like having a "feather in your hat."

Consider that each competitor has a hat, and that they even have the obligatory feather. It's expected. They have the expected degree and some extra training. Their office is very nice and they have a great staff. They have a yellow pages display ad and a web site. They are doing the latest procedures and their customers or patients or clients like them. Doesn't this pretty much describe everybody? Maybe even you?

Differentiating yourself in the marketplace means that you distinguish yourself in some fashion so that you stand apart from everybody else. The idea is that you want the marketplace to notice your hat preferentially over every other hat in the marketplace. "Why would anyone choose me over every other choice available to them in the marketplace?"

When everyone else is the same, those who take extra efforts to look different become noticed and preferred. When you are like everyone else, you are just one of the crowd! But the marketplace rewards those that are attractive! The quest is to become "attractive" to the marketplace.

The attitude you fly at, must be an attractive attitude. How your airplane orients itself in the market, the angle of its attitude, will determine how well it flies in the head winds and cross winds of the market. Becoming attractive is a principle – it's a philosophy as well as a strategy. As soon as you look like everyone else, you cease to be attractive. Check your orientational attitude and make it "attractive."

Distinguish Yourself

Would you ever agree to have brain surgery from someone you didn't believe had distinguished themselves in the field of cutting open people's heads? Nor would most consumers! You must distinguish yourself. Differentiate or die!

There are two parts to this equation. You must have the "right stuff" put together, meaning the education, experience, and state-of-the-art intelligence; and secondly, you must have your "stuff" put together right.

For starters, if you don't have the "right stuff" you won't be in the marketplace long. You'd be culled out of the herd faster than a lame steer. It's the market's default assumption that if you have a license and a business presence then you must be qualified to be in the market. It is one of the factors that makes the marketplace equal. But just because you exist doesn't make you good, or preferred.

Some people are savvy enough to know that not all dentists are created equal, that not all home contractors are equally gifted, and that not all physicians can make the same accurate diagnosis. Others who don't know these facts, who really think everyone is the same, can be shown or taught that there is a difference, and that it matters. That is accomplished through marketing, especially information marketing.

That's where having your "stuff" put together right comes to play. Aside from exceptional professional qualifications, it is the only remaining strategy you have to influence the consumer's mind or to differentiate yourself in the marketplace.

That's one of the marvels of the information age mentality. The modern mindset is preconditioned to check you out. If you are not packaged well and you don't present yourself well, you become just one of the crowd. If everyone else is substantially just like you (check your yellow pages) you have a problem. If everybody's ad says the same things as yours, you must do something different! You must say it in a different way that distinguishes you and makes you stand out and noticed heads and shoulders above everyone else.

Distinguishing yourself can be either the professional qualifications and services you provide, or the manner and style in which you package yourself and how you present the package.

Don't compete. Create.

Reinvention! What a marvelous strategy! It is another way of saying "don't predict the future – invent it!" If you're not thriving while playing with someone else's rules, then change the rules. Make your own!

In a world of stiff competition it is better to create than to compete. This is because you can't control your competition. But you can control you. With each invention and new creation you step ahead of your competition because they probably haven't figured it out yet. They're too busy competing to notice. Moving to the edge is better than staying huddled with the cloistered masses and being lost in the "sea of sameness."

As you create and re-create, it gives you something more to talk about and something to differentiate yourself with. It gives others, including the press, something to recognize you for that they can't see in others. It makes you newsworthy! It makes you fresh – again! And by contrast, it makes others look – well – stale and boring!

There are two areas of creation. The first is with regard to the goods and services that comprise your business. These are always good "talking points." The second deals with how you present them to the public, and how you bring the public to them. If you haven't noticed yet, there is a pattern to all this. There is the substance of what you, and then there is the sizzle of how you do it!

Create a new image and a fresh way to communicate the message. Use information technology. Reinvent how you do this so it creates better communications and new

perceptions. Honor the consumers need to get information and to have their emotional buying decisions ratified with rational logic. This is where packaging, presentation, and positioning strategy can pay off big time.

How you package “you” and present your “stuff”, matters! Your packaging determines whether your message is even seen or opened. Your timing and message determines whether you become favorably positioned in their mind as the knowledgeable “go-to” solution to their problem. It dictates how they regard you. Perceptions matter!

In the information age, information is king. When you create a better way of communicating your skills and how you can help people solve their problems, you gain a strategic advantage.

Improve your capabilities for serving the public and then re-package and re-purpose it in novel ways. For example, learn new science and be the first in your community to apply the new service appropriate with the discoveries. Then learn how to package and present this in new and novel ways. When you create a new way of communicating yourself to the market, the market will see you with different eyes.

Drip Market in the Funnel

Nobody makes significant decisions about spending money without “thinking about it.” We’ve all done it. It’s the common dodge from window shoppers and tire kickers. Automobiles, vacations, diamond rings, kitchen remodels, and elective health procedures are not purchased on the spur of the moment. The average time from the first thought to a significant cosmetic procedure decision is three years. Along the sales or decision path are multiple points of information gathering and usually some interaction with potential vendors.

In marketing circles, the path is often referred to as a sales channel. Each interaction with the prospect, and each exposure or conversation with the prospect is a “touch point”. Before prospects become actual buyers, there are several points where they think about, analyze, discuss, rationalize, and clarify their reasons for wanting to purchase.

Drip Marketing, like the name implies is the process of “dripping” on the potential prospect as they move down the sales channel. You must create and execute multiple points along the pathway where you reach out and touch the prospect. This is also called Relationship Marketing because you are attempting to build trust and confidence and increase the comfort level in the prospect’s mind and heart about doing business with you.

The nature of the conversation you have with the prospect as they move through the sales funnel will determine success or failure. This all implies that you have a sales funnel to begin with and that you thoughtfully deliver sequential messages (the “conversation”), and that you have a mechanism for delivering these messages automatically.

Large corporations can afford a marketing effort to put prospects into the big end of the funnel. Then sales teams take over to nurture the relationships and wine-‘n-dine them until they make buying decisions.

Small companies are not so blessed. They don't have sophisticated mechanized sales channels that will lead people patiently down this sales corridor. Small companies put a Yellow Pages display ad, throw some ads in the newspaper, maybe some radio and TV, and if they are gluttons for punishment, some direct mail. Most of this is not well coordinated, programmed, or thought out well. In fact, we rely on the marketing vendors themselves to design and create and write our stuff – the very people that are designing, creating and writing everyone else's stuff!

What does all this have to do with a funnel? Funnel marketing is the only kind of open marketing you can do that builds relationships and helps people along a path toward a buying decision. And it takes time!

In general, there are two kinds of marketing. One is branding, and the other is direct response. Branding and image marketing has its place as is demonstrated by Coke and Nike and Lexus. Direct response or message-specific marketing also has its place. Its purpose is to harvest the low-hanging fruit. It simply wants to scrape the cream off the top that has risen of its own accord and is ready to be gathered in.

The problem is that small businesses can't afford too much branding exposure, and they generally can't devote the time or expense to the drawn out sales process of lead generation and prospect nurturing.

It is precisely because of this that there is such an astounding opportunity to differentiate yourself. Who else is doing it? Virtually no one! So, if you will use this methodology to package and present yourself, to acquire prospects and nurture them, you will already be advantaged in the market. You will be heads and shoulders above anyone else because you will be the only one!

Automation and Timing

You are busy enough. The last thing you need is something else to distract you. This is why outsourcing and delegating and using business consultants are so invaluable. Keeping the main thing the main thing means working at the top of your license and skill level. It means outsourcing and buying turn-key systems that “plug-n-play”.

You don't have to do it all. You shouldn't do it all. Your time is too valuable doing something else. In a world of automation and outsourcing you should not weigh yourself down with tasks that can be outsourced and purchased.

Most small businesses have some marketing in play already. Many have an internet presence, and use Yellow Pages, newspaper display ads, radio or TV, and maybe even some direct mail. But that is about as far as it goes. If a dentist is looking to build professional referral relationships with physicians to get referrals from medical doctors, it

takes more than an advertisement, business card or brochure to secure inclusion in their private referral network.

Drip marketing with a funnel marketing strategy is a numbers game. It's about lead generation, lead nurturing, and lead qualification. Whether it deals with clients, patients, or referral sources, much or all of these processes can and should be automated.

The principles and steps are rather generic. Use your marketing efforts to attract interest (leads) and to invite people (patients, clients and referral sources) into the big end of the sales funnel. Make it safe for them. Give them something valuable – always informative useful information. Then drip on them again with something else. Let some time pass, and then offer them something else. Another report, another news worthy bulletin, something that will help them where they are. Then reach out with another “touch”. You keep doing this until they either go away or “buy.” You elevate the relationship when they are ready to deepen it.

This process can be automated, outsourced, and eternal – or evergreen.

Again – don't do things that others can do for you better, faster, and less costly, all things considered. Even though there is merit in “creating” a new image, the intent is not that it has to be done with original thought or sweat. It is often better to copy genius than to invent mediocrity! It is also much faster. Automate it, outsource it, and keep it “evergreen” or ongoing.

Get First-Mover Advantage & Build Barriers to Competitive Entry

If you don't do it, someone else will! Positioning is often about timing in the marketplace. It's been said that it is more important to be first than to be best! While you should never intend to be second best – the urgency of timing in a competitive marketplace underscores the importance of acting with executive intelligence, being swift with decisions, and assembling a strategy that makes you attractive, differentiates you from any competitor, and communicates those distinctions in ways that make you look attractive - all this while building relationships with prospects along a strategic pathway toward a buying decision.

Positioning is favored when you claim the “first mover advantage.” Those in 2nd place are seldom remembered without incredible effort on the part of the contestant. When you are the first clinician or business person in your community to implement new science, or to introduce new techniques, or are seen as taking the leadership role in something, it helps secure your positioning. When you are early, it keeps the “also rans” at bay and always licking at your heels.

While you should always have an “abundance mentality” where you live and breathe like you believe that a rising tide raises all boats, there is still wisdom in securing your own position. When you distinguish or differentiate yourself either through your services or through your presentation, you are building natural barriers to competitive entry.

Front Door Marketing

If your business is one that accepts and encourages referrals, then those who would be potential referral sources must be approached in a way such that a week later they know they been approached. Be professional, but don't be forgettable. This again, is all about the packaging and how you present it.

You **MUST** use a calling card and have a “door approach” that is remarkable! You must provide something valuable to the referral source that helps them in their business.

What if you supplied them with a 3-ring binder – a resource or reference manual that helps them understand aspects about your profession they may not know about?

For example, given the close ties between periodontal disease and heart disease, the so called “oral-systemic connection”, what if a dentist were to supply a physicians with a reference manual about how chronic oral infections tie into the risk factors for heart disease? What if a physician were to supply sleep apnea information to other physicians and dentists, educating them about sleep disordered sleep? What if an attorney were to supply a CPAs with a resource binder with business law information that is specific to their client's needs? What if a CPA were to supply attorneys with a 3-ring binder of how tax law and insurance affects the status of business transactions? What if you wrote a book and gave it to the referral source? What if you produced a business or professional practice magazine and gave it to the referral source?

The real question is that if you did, would it make you look different or stand out better than your competition? How many other professionals are approaching your potential referral sources with business cards and tri-fold brochures? Could you do better? If you don't, you will disappear as just another face in the crowd.

Back Door Marketing

This tip works especially well for professionals who must interact with other health and business professionals about patients, clients, and customers in common. Sending communications about matters of business or clients/patients matters, from one professional to another, demands the attention of the receiving professional. This is not necessarily new.

But what can be new, is in how you package this interaction, present it, and then follow up on it. This privilege of having favored communications should not to be abused or be over-the-top. If done right, if done tastefully and professionally, the receiving professional or business person can't help but be impressed with the professionalism and the person or office behind the communication.

Marketing through the back door is a great way to set up reciprocity referral networks. If a certain health professional or business professional begins receiving a significant amount of communication (marketing) from another professional, and/or is getting referrals – it will get their attention! It breeds reciprocity.

There is a subtle “debtor” relationship that is created with unsolicited favors – in this case, referrals. It at least demands or draws attention and puts you in a position where you are esteemed in new light. When you do then approach the potential referral source, to whom you have sent business, you can afford to present yourself with new posture.