

Is Your Marketing 'Solution' Your Biggest 'Problem?'

Have you had current or potential customers tune out on you while you're speaking to them? You're giving them this outstanding description of your process and capability and it's going bing, bong, kazoom over their heads. Want to know why this happens? Read on because you'll find the whole problem is actually your 'SOLUTION.'

Doesn't make sense? Don't worry. Within the course of this article, you will find out just what it is that gets your clients attention and how to keep that attention by shifting from solution to problems.

The problem with solutions

When you ask someone what they do, they usually spit out their process that they see as a solution to your problems. So a person who cuts trees and mows the lawns would say, "I cut trees and mow lawns."

I have a lawn mower, so that eliminates him completely, doesn't it?

Bringing the problem to the fore, however, triggers a totally different response altogether. If the same person said, "Do you have a less than immaculate garden?" My response to the query would be, "Yes, maybe I do."

Having established the problem, he is now in a position to know that I have a need for his service. Even better, he has brought to my attention a problem I didn't realize I had.

Always work with a problem

If you notice people around you, all of them are beset with problems. If you were to stand up and say, "Who has a cold that they just can't fix?" you will get about 6-7 hands going up instantly.

This happens because you're attacking a problem. Obviously, they assume you have the solution, but by bringing their attention to the problem, you are targeting their specific needs. Once you've got their attention, it's now time to make your pitch and give the specific target audience the solution.

The beauty of problems

Solutions fall far short of the mark. Problems however go the full distance and more. If you noticed in the previous example there were two target audiences. One was the immediate target--the people with a cold. The other was the people who were going to get the cold (no doubt from their illustrious colleagues). The secondary audience has no need for my product because it doesn't have the problem. But in a week or so, as the germs move 'homes,' the second audience too will be potential customers.

A solution, on the other hand, does less than a quarter of the job, if at all. It has been proven time and time again that you cannot sell to anyone who doesn't want to buy. The only reason someone would want to buy a product or service from you is because it is solving some problem that is not being tackled currently.

Your first task is to therefore qualify the problem

Find out what your current client's problem is and then get their attention by reconstructing your statement in a problem-solution-target audience sequence.

Problems tend to perk up the ears of your target audience. Once you've achieved that you then give them the solution (sometimes one crafted specially to their needs), and they understand the concept and respond to it.

Be aware of your specific target audience

Ask anyone who their customers are, and they usually say everyone. Then take a look at the newspaper classifieds. Businesses are always looking for specific positions to hire; people are always specifying exactly the kind of person they would like to meet in the personals.

Yet, you look at major advertising and the target is everyone...So which advertising actually works better? I don't think I'd be too off the mark to state that dollar for dollar, the classifieds (thanks to their positioning) achieve far, far more than huge multinationals.

An example that you can learn from...

One of the recent advertising campaigns that has done well via the concept of sacrifice is "Jeans West." They have sacrificed color, style and any other tags that competitors are running. They focus totally on their positioning, which is 'Fits Best.' The ads go on to demonstrate the price of time. One woman says, "These jeans cost me 2 hours." Another says, "These jeans cost me 45 minutes."

Can you see the target audience here? It's specifically people who have a problem getting the right fit. Simple, isn't it?

Most people would look at that and say, "Isn't that too small a niche?" You think so? Think again. By getting their tiny little niche, they have stamped themselves very clearly in the minds of customers.

It's quite clear how Jeans West (and their really smart ad agency) have done their homework.

Problem: Wasting time finding the right fit. Solution: Finding the right fit in no time at all. Target Audience: Jean lovers that need the right fit.

Empower me, don't tell me!

I get e-mail from a travel agent every now and then. In the e-mail he gives me information that I could get just about anywhere. It has prices of airfares, new destinations and other such things that I could find with a little help from the newspapers or the Internet. Notice there's no problem there. It's all about solution, solution, solution.

I don't have any need to travel right now and so I delete the email because it provides me with no tangible solution. When I decide to travel, the situation will have changed and none of their wonderful solutions will apply to me.

On the other hand, do you have trouble getting large carry-ons past the check-in counter? Or would you want to know of a foolproof way to beat jetlag? Or would you like to know the tricks to get upgraded on your flight?

Most of us would answer yes to almost all these questions because they present problems that need to be solved. The travel agent has spent years in the business and knows stuff that you and I haven't got a clue about -important tips that we could carry around in our heads for years to come and use them as and when the problem presents itself.

How people respond

Every problem is a trigger and when people run into that situation they respond to your solution. Be sure, however, that the solution is not a passing fad, here today and gone tomorrow.

Also remember, when you empower people it adds to their knowledge. If you're selling an expensive computer to a company, it's not worth it telling the purchaser about the technical specifications and how it runs.

Figure out the problem and tell him how the technology will solve that problem. Remember he has to report to his boss and the boss has to report to the shareholders.

When you empower them with the problem and the solution, they can relay that on further, thus giving the whole process a sense of legitimacy.

It doesn't matter, however, whether you sell computers, air tickets or wine. The same principles apply and you will find that not only your sales, but your thought process and alertness increases in leaps and bounds simultaneously.

Your action plan

- 1) Find the unique solution you provide.
- 2) Differentiate it from all your obvious 'competition.'
- 3) Find out the problem it answers.
- 4) Target your audience very carefully.
- 5) To stay top of mind, give out information that answers problems for which you provide solutions.

Hungry? Try the \$.85 McDonald's Burger!

See the problem? See the solution. Great communication in advertising comes from great marketing. And great problems!

Go out there and find yours!