

KISS (KEEP-IT-SIMPLE-SILLY!) FOR WEBSITES

Occam's Razor Solves Marketing Misinformation

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Many years ago I had a professor whose favourite saying was, "It's the simple things that elude people." It's not a new idea of course, but it is an important one, often associated with 14th century English logician William of Ockham. Occam's Razor as it is commonly referred to, states that "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity" which in pop culture terms has been interpreted as meaning 'the simplest solution is most often the best.' It is also pretty clear that old Ockham would have been a big believer in what we now call the 'Paradox of Choice' as coined by Barry Schwartz in his book by the same name. The Paradox of Choice basically describes how customers intent on buying from you, don't, because they are confused with too many options; to paraphrase Ockham, features or options must not be multiplied beyond what it takes to get an order.' In fact, it is pretty well understood by those of us who actually study how to communicate a marketing message that a focus on an emotional benefit is what works, not another new feature.

The implications of this seemingly simple insight into decision-making are quite significant for marketing executives: features are out; emotional and psychological benefits are in. Ah, but what emotional benefit, there's the rub. I will assume that if you are reading this you are interested in improving your business and that you are open to new ways of doing things, and that starts with new ways of thinking about things.

Finding Your Emotional Benefit

Finding your emotional benefit is really not that hard if you know where to look. The extended version of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the place to start. Every product or service needs to fit into at least one level of the psychological hierarchy from basic survival, to 'be all you can be' self-actualization. Every successful brand has its place on the hierarchy.

The Web was recently all abuzz with the success of the Old Spice commercials featuring Isaiah Mustafa. Many analysts chalked its success up to the social networking aspect of the campaign but as much as that may have helped initially, it also over-exposed it, shortening its effective run. There were lots of things the Old Spice campaign got right. It was kind of a perfect-creative-marketing-storm, but the one thing that actually drove its success was the emotional value proposition - Old Spice will make you more attractive to women, and sex is one of Maslow's basic needs.

The Key Component to Marketing is Establishing Want

How do you improve your business, how do you increase your sales, how do you sell more stuff? And how do you simplify the process so you narrow your focus down to a manageable marketing communication concept - a brand. Following our pal Ockham's advice, the answer is simple, concentrate on why people should buy from you.

What customers want is the key component in today's materialistic consumer environment, especially in a marketplace that breeds competitive brand alternatives like rabbits breed bunnies.

Why people should buy from you is not the same as why they should buy your product or service. If you are a monopoly then the answer is easy, people have two choices, to buy from you or not at all. But most companies aren't so lucky. Most companies have

competition either selling the exact same products and services or substitute products and services.

What customers' think they need is only one criteria of the decision-making process; in fact, want invariably plays a large role in establishing what people think they need. For most products and services, need plays only a superficial role in what people actually buy. What your audience wants is really the decision-clincher, a fact that should be at the centre of all your marketing.

How To Sell Anybody Anything on the Web

According to Management Consultant David Fields of Ascendant Consulting there are six basic sales criteria.

Know: A potential client must know you exist if you want to make a sale, that's pretty obvious. This aspect of the sales process has led to an obsession with search engine optimization and social networking. What needs to be remembered is that knowing of your existence, as important as it is, is only one of the six sales criteria.

Like: Your intended audience may know who you are, and what you do, but that doesn't mean they care, or that you have any chance of getting an order: for example, you may be able to name a half-a-dozen different kinds of apples but when you go to the supermarket, you don't buy just any apple, you buy the one you like best.

If you don't like a company you will find somebody else to buy from. Just because you're good at what you do or sell the best product on the market doesn't mean a thing if people don't like your company. How often have you sworn-off a company because the person on the telephone was uncooperative. That company may have thousands of employees and a customer service manual three inches thick, but if the minimum wage call centre person is a jerk, you'll find yourself someone else.

Need: Every client has needs but in the final analysis those needs are a highly over-rated motivating factor when it comes to buying a specific product or service from a specific supplier. You may need an accountant but you have many options from which to hire. You may need drywall to complete a project but you can buy it from a dozen different local building supply dealers. There are very few products or services for which you can't find an alternative or that can't be purchased from multiple vendors.

Want: Of all the sales criteria listed the most important one is want - what you want ultimately overrides all other considerations, even trust and affordability. I once had a teacher who rode the bus to work every day for twenty years until he saved enough money to buy a Mercedes - granted he was crazy but you get my point. You may need a mobile phone but you want an iPhone; you may need a new suit but you want a Boss suit; you want your audience to want your company.

Trust: People are leery of companies they don't trust. Trust is an important factor in building a long-term business relationship. Companies that engage in unethical practices or who cross the ethical marketing line may get one order, but they will never build a long-term business relationship or customer loyalty.

Afford: And then there is money, there is always an issue when it comes to what things cost but surprisingly it's not even close to the deciding factor in many purchases. Often companies think that cutting prices is the surefire method of attracting more business, but depending on the company, brand, category, and target audience, cutting prices may have the opposite effect. Every company has budgets, and no one would suggest that companies buy things they can't afford, but sometimes it is better to wait until you

can afford the optimum solution instead of making-do, and ending up with a second rate or mediocre result.

A Final Thought

As complicated as Web marketing has become with the myriad of digital advertising options available, the only real way you can move forward is to break things down to a series of simple decisions based on the fundamental aspects of human nature. People need to feel connected and they need to feel good about your company. We all inherently know this but for some reason find it more comforting to put our faith in technological solutions that you may, or may not really understand, and that often make no real-world practical sense.

People are people and they are all motivated by the same natural hard-wired instincts. Your job is to find the one motivating factor that will get your audience to salivate over your brand, and present it in a way that will make your company the one company everyone wants to do business with.