

BRIDGES OF MORRIS COUNTY...

MORRIS COUNTY
BUSINESS *Life*



Is Anyone Listening Out There????!!

By John L. Picard

“Clear, huh? Why a four-year-old child could understand it. Run out and find me a four-year-old child. I can’t make heads or tails out of it.” — Groucho Marx

Change is Your Only Constant. The economy is recovering, global unrest is momentarily quieting and the customer is increasingly shifting their vision forward again. To market in these times, businesses are aiming at where their relationships are going — not where their customers have been. They are trying to make “heads or tails” of what’s in their customers’ heads.

Ask Questions and Listen to Answers. To avoid being restricted to a scenic view of their tails, businesses today are walking alongside their customers and talking to them about things of importance to them. It is increasingly about trust and making the connection personal. Whether on a massive scale through automation or individually by picking up the phone, personalizing your relationship begins with *your questions and their answers*.

Get Out There. Be proactive in creating opportunities to ask questions. When was the last time you forgot to ask your spouse or child how their day was? Would you do less with the clients who are the lifeblood of your career or business?

A good starting point is to get on the phone and touch base with your best or fastest-growing clients. Share some insights about your product and where you can help them. Also, send out a mail survey asking, “What are your biggest concerns right now?” If you have an e-mail marketing program or newsletters in place, ask topical questions and share your conclusions. Many would love to know what their peers are thinking. The act of asking says you care. Last, but not least, turn your questions into opportunities to add value and sales. Ray Kroc turned the act of asking a question into one of the most powerful marketing techniques of the century . . . “Will you have fries with that order?”

The Customer is Empowered. This is the age of buyer markets. Today, *they don’t buy what we sell; we are selling what they buy*. Show them that you know them, understand them, “hear” them and will adapt for them. It all begins with listening. Does your product reflect their latest needs? “LISTEN.” Do you bill at a time convenient for them? “LISTEN.” Do you offer added services? “LISTEN.” Do you help when and where they need it? “LISTEN . . . AND ACT.”

Wear a Party Hat, If You Must. Along the way, don’t forget to put yourself into the communications. Let them hear your real voice, your personality, your feeling. Be funny . . . be fatherly (or motherly) . . . be authoritative, even, as my 12-year-old daughter says . . . be cool. As long as it is genuine and consistent, it will reflect the real experience of buying from you.

Everyone’s Talking About It. Knowledge is powerful stuff. Letting your customers know you have it and use it for their benefit is even more powerful. Thread their answers and your solutions into every communication, sales presentation and marketing tool you have. Integrate your marketing, not around your product, but around how the customer benefits from the knowledge and fit of your product or service.

Uh-oh, Not More. Think you are finished? Hah! After you have done all this listening, you have to get back out there and do it again. The answers will be different tomorrow than they were today. Look to where these answers are leading and strategies for marketing success and growth will appear before your very eyes.

Listen to My Father. When I was a boy and I would be struggling to solve some school problem, my father would struggle with me and walk me through a solution. When frustration would get high, he would jovially reduce the stress by yelling, “Listen louder!” Today, whatever the technology or medium, use it to listen louder — or at least go out and find a four-year-old child — they’ll tell you.

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