

BRIDGES OF MORRIS COUNTY...

MORRIS COUNTY
BUSINESS *Life*



“It’s Not About Me”

By John L. Picard

“Everything starts with the customer.” — Louis V. Gerstner, Jr.

The kids are back in school. Everyone’s returned from vacation. The economy (as promised) is recovering. It just “feels” like it’s time to get back to work.

Making your marketing “work.” From presentations to websites, marketing needs to deliver. One of the most common challenges to realizing the potential of this investment is the tendency to “get in the way of your customer message.” How many websites talk only about their company? How many sales calls begin and end without giving you an opportunity to get a word in edgewise? It reminds me of the old Yellow Pages TV commercial where the Valley Girl says: “Enough about me, let’s talk about my hair.”

It’s about hopes and fears. The fix is simple and all it takes is a change in perspective. Move the focus of your communications to the customer and connect everything you offer to their needs, challenges, audiences and working style. After you have shown them that you understand them, it is easy to leverage trust into opportunity.

Here is a fast 8-point outline to help rebuild your story around the customer. Review all of your marketing for opportunities to rebalance your message and form a single, cohesive story throughout.

1. Situation. Talk about the prospect, his industry and job. Show you are an expert and speak his language. Review websites, industry information and annuals for great stuff to weave into your message. This is the area that says you “get it.”

2. Need. What threats and opportunities are facing your prospect? Let them know you understand and can help get rid of the pain or be a winner. This is where you move the conversation to shared recognition of the current opportunity.

3. Solution. Unlike daytime soap operas, you can’t leave them hanging. There are real-life answers that will address these needs. Talk about the tools, approaches and services that will get them to this Promised Land.

4. Benefit. Johnny Carson used to say, “You buy the premise, you get the joke.” Your prospect has now bought your premise and you can deliver the punch line — real and tangible benefits that they can almost taste.

5. You. Finally, it’s time to “talk about your hair,” or in this case, the power of working with you. Take the opportunity to show credibility, history, strength, value, service and relevance. Set up the conversation for your offer (below).

6. Offer. This is the good part. “Tell them what they can get, Johnny . . .” Now bring it on home with a discussion of your specific recommendations and offer. Connect everything to a benefit — the details, process, cost and value. Make them salivate.

7. Action Step. After you show the incredible value of your offer, show them how they can get it right now. Call. Write. Sample. Have them do whatever it takes to move to the next step.

8. Close. Whether a sales meeting or phone call, ask for the business. I can’t tell you how often a client says the right thing but leaves money on the table because they don’t ask for the business. ASK.

Every stage of this process should move the dialogue forward. Listen. Share insights. Keep the prospect and his needs moving and at the center of everything.

“But wait, there’s more!” Find a way to add urgency and timeliness to your offer. Keep adding value. We have all learned from those wonderful folks who bring you Ginsu Knives and exercise bikes on late-night television that you can keep piling on additional benefits to your offer to make it impossible to resist.

Bottom Line. Create a relationship flow that naturally moves from awareness to interest to action to commitment, and finally to long-term mutual benefit.

JOHN PICARD is principal of Picard & Company, a strategic marketing firm specializing in business growth and customer retention. Functioning as a “relationship architect,” the firm strengthens customer relationships to optimize long-term returns and profitability. Mr. Picard can be reached at 908-771-0512 or via e-mail at jpicaard@picardmarketing.com or visit www.picardmarketing.com.