

# BRIDGES OF MORRIS COUNTY...

MORRIS COUNTY  
**BUSINESS** *Life*



## Survival of the Marketing Fittest — Articulate to Differentiate

By John L. Picard

If Charles Darwin were alive today, I imagine he would be a regular guest on CNN's *Your Money* and public radio's *Marketplace*, where he would offer up clever sound bites about evolution and survival of the fittest in this increasingly competitive business climate. Everywhere they turn, customers and prospects are bombarded with competing messages given by businesses talking about themselves and not about the value they are driving to their buyers. The companies that are able to cut through the clutter by making their messages consistent, relevant and personal have a powerful competitive edge. Think of it as "survival of the most articulate." Here are some of the latest ways to hone and deliver that message.

**Sharpening the Tools.** The Internet has elevated the importance of clear messages and targeted language to new heights. The words you choose to use in your marketing — across your website, ads, brochures, literature, newsletters and e-mails — must communicate your "value offering" and the "voice" you use to drive that message. Shift your message away from a story about you and move to a story about your customer. Talk about their needs and their opportunities. Use language that speaks to the benefits that make a real difference to the customer, right now.

**Expanded Capabilities.** With today's computer and network technology, it is more cost effective than ever to leverage your customer knowledge in your message. By using off-the-shelf software, like Outlook, ACT, Goldmine or even custom databases, you can manage customers, follow leads and accelerate your sales cycles. Every point of contact, every touch point can use this information to adapt and develop a custom (and customer) driven offer. Knowledge turns sales pitches into dialogue, and with dialogue comes involvement that translates into higher conversions of sales.

**Make It Personal.** Even the smallest of business owners can now personalize and adapt their sales literature and direct mail pieces to create special offers to appeal to the differing needs of current and potential customers. By blending a combination of traditional and digital printing as well as in-house computer printer output, many companies are developing their own uniquely customized, high-caliber collateral materials. One idea is to assemble a pocket folder brochure that holds a series of mini-brochures in one pocket. The other pocket features a customized "library" of individually computer-printed "step sheets" chosen by client type, product and industry. The end result is an affordable, customized sales package or brochure.

**Put the Customer into the Message.** The Internet has put knowledge "out there" that you can use to really personalize the message to individual customer opportunities. From governmental filings and annual reports you can find key customer "hot buttons" to drop into your sales message. Go to their website and learn what they believe is their latest and most important information. Also read between the lines and look for their values and fears — *what seems to keep them up at night*. A quick way to leverage the web is to grab their logo from their site and drop it into your presentation. People love to see their name. Do you think your prospects are any different?

**Production.** Use the latest technologies to personalize your marketing tools around sales events, seminars or conventions. In many of your neighborhood print shops you can generate signs, banners, posters and convention materials connected to an event's theme. By building custom materials, you are telling your audience you care enough to concentrate and focus on this business.

**The Bottom Line.** Personalize your marketing communication efforts to expedite the sales cycle and increase your conversion rate. Communicate effectively or be left behind. While Darwin might argue that politicians have shown communication to be an evolutionary dead-end, the ability to communicate clearly and be understood by your customers can mean the difference between the survival and extinction of your business.

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