
SECTION 9

PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING
PROCESS

**Building
Like and Trust**

- 41 Creating a Brand Stimulates Trust**
- 42 Like Me – Like My Team**
- 43 Table Manners Sell or Repel**
- 44 When Your Prospect Visits**
- 45 Active Professionals Give Back**

TROY WAUGH

41

CREATING A BRAND STIMULATES TRUST

- Q**uestion: What is branding?
- A. That thing they burn into cows
 - B. A logo
 - C. A slogan
 - D. I don't really know, but I'll look like an idiot if I admit it.

Of course, the term “brand” historically referred to searing the hide of one rancher’s cattle with his distinctive mark so that it couldn’t be confused with anyone else’s.

Many firm owners and marketing professionals get carried away with the concept of branding. Most branding efforts end with wasted dollars and little results. One managing partner said he’d “thrown \$100,000 down that rat hole.”

Branding is a way of “packaging” a professional firm. It should position you uniquely in people’s minds. Branding should not only attract new clients, but reinforce your existing clients’ buying decisions.

Firm Consistency

The point, of course, is that if you work hard to make your service that much better than everyone else’s, you want to make sure that the differentiation isn’t lost on your prospective buyers. In fact, you want to go out of your way to make sure they don’t miss it.

The problem in branding your firm is the lack of consistency from one partner to another. The reason that McDonalds has one of the most successful brands is not because of the gourmet quality of their food. It is because of the consistency of the customer experience—worldwide. The potential customer believes that each McDonalds experience will be the same.

The same cannot be said of a firm. Each partner or associate is a separate experience in many firms.

Branding Is Personal

The fundamental reasons why brands work are twofold: (a) client trust and (b) service consistency.

In his book *Trust in The Balance*, Robert Bruce Shaw says that trust requires integrity, *concern* and results. From the client's point of view, a professional firm can have the highest integrity and achieve excellent results. But without *concern* you will be unsuccessful in establishing trust. That's the personal side of branding.

Conclusion

When your firm is consistent across partners, you are more easily able to build like and trust. Trust and consistency build a brand.

LIKE ME – LIKE MY TEAM

One of the best ways to get people to like you is to first get them to enjoy dealing with your team.

The Most Important Marketer in Your Firm

A vital link in your team is your receptionist. It's true. Did you know that callers talk with your receptionist two to three times more frequently than they talk with you? Every time your phone rings, your business is on the line.

A frugal-minded office often concludes that the receptionist has spare time when not answering the phone. So the receptionist is assigned administrative filler work. That way, when a prospect calls or comes into the office, often the receptionist will be too busy to help him. This happened to me recently. I walked into a reception area and the receptionist did not acknowledge me for several minutes because she was too busy entering data into a spreadsheet.

Or we decide that the newest member of our admin staff should handle the phone. Seems logical, doesn't it? Assign the person with the least knowledge of our firm the job with the most contact with our prospects!

Then, there is the question of training. I am sure the ones I've talked to in the last six weeks had no instruction into what to say when answering calls. Here are some quotes I've

heard recently from receptionists from professionals' offices: At 2:30 p.m. "He's not come in yet, I'll put you to his voice mail." CLICK... "He's gone for the day, please call back tomorrow...". "Are you with a company?" "Accounting offices!..". "Does he know you?..". "Does he know what you're calling about?"

Conclusion

Many firms have "trained" their #1 marketing agent to *repel* business rather than attract it. The frightening aspect is that many firms are spending tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours on marketing programs to attract prospects while they let a low-paid receptionist cost them business.

You can make your receptionist a marketing asset rather than a liability with a little creative thought at no expense.

*(See Appendix 3 for a 30-day training program
for your new receptionist.)*

TABLE MANNERS SELL OR REPEL

People form an impression of your professionalism based on your table manners.

Recently, I enjoyed a lunch with several younger professionals. One of them told me he had recently dined with a partner and a prospective client. He reported that, “After the dinner, my partner suggested that, before entertaining clients again, I improve my table manners.”

If you define marketing as communication, and intend to build relationships with prospects and clients, then good entertaining skills are essential to a good marketing program. Let’s cover a few of the basics for a successful power lunch:

Treat Your Guests with Respect

Open doors for your guests and encourage them to precede you to the table. Allow your guest to be seated first, in the most preferred seats. If there is a good view, encourage the guest to face that direction. Give your undivided attention to your guests. Always allow your guest to go first: ordering drinks or the meal, taking the first sip or bite, and ordering coffee or desert.

The host’s responsibility is to carry a convivial conversation. You may be intimidated, but if you sit through your meal without joining in the conversation, you are communicating to your guest that you are not interested.

Order Foods that Are Easy to Eat

Avoid any foods that cannot be controlled easily. If you aren't skilled at twirling pasta, don't order it; it will be too messy. Shellfish that require squeezing and digging, ribs, corn on the cob, and fried chicken are all difficult to eat daintily. Tear your roll gently; don't saw it with a knife.

Never talk with food in your mouth (so take small bites so you can easily enter conversations). When you feel that bit of food between your teeth, swish it out silently and unobtrusively. Only cut and take one bite of food at a time.

Blot lipstick so it does not appear on glasses. And never place your napkin in the middle of a dirty plate. Sit up straight in your chair. Don't hover or slump over your plate or lean your chair back on two legs. Keep elbows off the table.

What About Drinks, Appetizers, and Dessert?

Always offer these to your guests, and if they order one, order something yourself. Never let them eat a course alone. Appetizers or dessert should not be shared, unless your guest asks to. Then, ask the server to split it for you.

Conclusion

Table manners may seem too basic to cover. But many people form impressions of you from simple things. So brush up on your etiquette and table manners for better results. If you feel your staff would benefit, arrange a catered lunch and hire an etiquette trainer to teach the basics. When people are confident of their manners, they can focus their attention on the client rather than worrying about what they might be doing wrong.

44

WHEN YOUR PROSPECT VISITS

Imagine that you are visiting a professional firm for the first time.

You tell yourself that this is going to be the year when you really hold the line on fees. Old Reliable, LLP has been the firm you've hired for ten years now and, for the most part, you guess they are doing a good job. But, your banker has made an appointment for you with Steve Bennett at Likem & Trustem whom he recommends highly.

You've assembled all of the materials that you think you need for your 9:00 am meeting with Steve at Likem & Trustem's offices. The materials checklist Steve sent you was really helpful and you have everything that the list indicated you needed.

By the time you arrive, it's 8:50. You're actually early for your appointment (no thanks to the weather) and the directions that Steve emailed to you yesterday sure helped. Come to think of it, you hadn't asked for the directions, Steve had just called to confirm the appointment and offered to send the map.

First Impressions: Feeling Welcome

As you step off of the elevator, you find yourself in a comfortable reception area that looks a lot like a large living room. The receptionist is currently on the phone, but another per-

son comes out from around the counter and is walking toward you. “Good morning Mr. Smith” she says with a smile, “ I’m Susan Jones, the Director of First Impressions here. May I take your coat?”

“Can I get you something to drink? We have both regular and decaffeinated coffee (so that’s what you smell!) or tea, bottled water, and soft drinks.”

“Good morning Mr. Smith” the receptionist says as she hangs up the phone, “I’ll let Mr. Bennett know that you’re here.” You notice that there are several issues of today’s *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and some materials on Likem & Trustem. You dig into an interesting article.

As you wait for your 9 am appointment, you can’t quite keep yourself from observing what is going on around you. Visitors are called by name, coats disappear onto sturdy hangers, refreshments are served, and soft music continues to play in the background.

About halfway through your article, Steve comes out to greet you. As he leads you back toward the conference rooms, Susan asks you if you were able to finish the article you were reading. She tells you that on your way out, she’ll have a copy of it waiting to take with you.

Conclusion

The next time you walk into your office, come in as if you were a prospect. What image is your receptionist presenting? Your reception area? What have you done to prepare visitors ahead of time to have a positive experience? If you’re not satisfied with the answers, think about inexpensive ways of improving the situation.

ACTIVE PROFESSIONALS GIVE BACK

Professionals who give back to their communities are well liked by all business people. You are often called upon to donate time and money to not-for-profit organizations. This is a good thing, but as the joke goes, “Not-for-profits means not-for-profit for the service provider too.”

I do not want to limit or discourage your participation and support for religious, civic, and social causes, but I can help you turn your *not-for-profit* engagements into *for-profit* investments.

Stop Discounting Your Fees

Rather than discounting your fees, make a contribution to your client that equals the discount you have been taking. When you contribute to the not-for-profit, you will appear on the contributors list, and you may be allowed to present your check to the board. Discounting makes you appear to be a low bidder (cheap fees), whereas making a contribution tells the client you are a benefactor. There is a huge difference in the perception by the governing board and the people they refer to you.

Support Your Partners' and Staff's Activities

When you have staff members involved in charitable organizations, support their activities with firm donations or services. Too often, professionals spread their support among too many organizations. Contributing \$100 to ten organizations will not be as effective for you as \$1,000 to one group. Backing a firm member will create even more impact.

Offer Your Office for Meetings

Making your office available costs you nothing and can benefit you in big ways. When board members of a NFP visit your offices, they may think about accounting or tax matters. Getting them on your turf will encourage them to talk to you about their business or personal needs.

Get to Know the Board Members

Usually the board members of NFP agencies are movers and shakers in your community. Take them to lunch or breakfast and get to know them. When you share a common interest in a NFP's mission, you have a theme for your visits. These board members can be valuable sources of referrals and new business.

Conclusion

Appearing to use a not-for-profit agency for selling new business is not a good image to convey. When you are getting to know the board members, refrain from talking about your services until someone asks. On the other hand, don't take this word of caution so seriously that you use it as excuse not to get to know each board member. Tom Hopkins says, "Sell like a lion, but act like a lamb."

If you are going to serve on a NFP agency board or donate fees to their cause, you should make it your marketing mission to develop relationships with everyone.