

Book Excerpt...

Secrets to Overcoming Marketing Resistance and Nurturing Customer Loyalty

By Brian Norris (info@briannorris.com), ©2005

In 2004, Research Firm Yankelovich released a survey on marketing resistance. The results were amusing at best. Most of the data, though, rather than creating new insights, reinforced common knowledge.



***BS Flag:** First, surveys can be poor indicators of future trends or buying behaviors, especially when they concern a subject as polarizing as marketing. For instance, every generation has a different bias for or against marketing. Additionally, people with different incomes are going to respond differently, especially if one group lacks the power to buy the goods or services being promoted in the first place.*

Finally, when people respond to surveys they lie! We're a private nation and highly protective of giving away data that might be used to herd us into a new demographic or manipulate us to buy something. Plus, hating marketing is the in thing right now. Attitudes towards issues are cyclical; They change often, only to return to their previous stage years later. With these wide gaps in the population and in perception, take any survey on the subject of marketing, sales or advertising with a skeptical grain of salt.

Here are the specifics of the data and my response.

For starters, the Yankelovich survey included 601 respondents. That's hardly a scientifically meaningful sample size. And you can't let percentages impress you either, they're never as impressive as they sound. Suppose for instance, that your potential universe of buyers consists of 20 people. Are all of them qualified prospects? Is the message created with all of them in mind or segmented to resonate differently with each niche within that population? If the people in your survey aren't buyers or potential buyer, the results don't matter to begin with.

According to the survey conducted by Yankelovich, 59 percent feel that most marketing and advertising has very little relevance to them. In our fictitious universe, that's 12 of the 20 people.

Does this surprise anyone? Most marketing and advertising messages are absolutely irrelevant to begin with. They contain no unique benefit or clear narrative. They seldom include a call to action or built in response mechanism. Is it any wonder why people feel disconnected? As I discuss in my book, *The Creative Sales and Marketing Manual*, the era of broad stroke marketing is over. If you try to be all things to all people, you'll be nothing special to anyone.

Tip: To create relevancy, you must segment your marketing messages to connect with each of your niches and micro niches. Be the biggest fish in the smallest profitable, sustainable pond possible. And if the pond doesn't exist yet, create your own.

The research further concluded that 64 percent (13 out of our 20) are concerned about practices and motives of marketers and advertisers. Whenever you're seeking to reconnect with prospects and build a relationship with them, you risk offending some. As long as the practice protects the right to privacy and isn't unlawful or dangerous, then we can't worry about going overboard. If the effort doesn't produce results then it's questionable. If you've thought out the strategy and implemented it thoroughly and still were unable to hit your objective, it's not failure, it's marketing research.

The Yankelovich survey continues by suggesting that 61 percent (12 out of 20) feel marketers and advertisers don't treat consumers with respect. Respect is crucial to credibility, no doubt. But what constitutes respect, or the lack of it?

At its core, respecting our buyers should include avoiding vulgarity, timely response to questions, a streamlined buying process to save our consumers time. Great service. Truth in marketing. Consistency. Honoring warranties, refund policies, hours of operation, establishing pricing guidelines. An organization unable to meet these most basic expectations shouldn't be in business.

Another survey tidbit suggests that 65 percent (13 out of 20) think there should be more limits and regulations on marketing and

advertising. **No! Anyone who seeks to add more bureaucracy to the process of keeping businesses afloat should try running one.**

A creative industry figures out how to get through any limit or regulation anyway. Think about how surveys are now being used to call consumers on the Do-Not-Call List. Look at the ongoing success of the alcohol or cigarette industries to reach their target audiences despite the myriad regulations on what they can or can't do, say or market to.

I don't advocate lying or misrepresentation. Still, the marketplace has controls that generally force the minority of shady companies to shrivel. Positively Passionate Marketers can work creatively within current guidelines and get stellar results.

According to the Yankelovich survey, 69 percent (14 people out of our 20) are interested in products and services that would help them skip or block marketing. Is that really surprising? The real issue here is clutter and lack of differentiation in the marketplace. Bombarding prospects with a dull, untargeted message makes the job of marketing more difficult for everyone.

As "prosumers", we have several tools to give us a choice over what messages we pay attention to. They include caller ID, the remote control, pop up blockers, SPAM filters, TiVo, better browsers and a super-strong delete finger. I use many of these tools too because I relish in the power to choose. Don't you?

Finally, the Yankelovich study found that 33 percent (almost 7 of our 20) would be willing to have a slightly lower standard of living to live a society without marketing and advertising.

A society without marketing and advertising? How sad. Forget lower standard of living. How would people deal with their dysfunctions? How much slower would our march towards enlightenment become? We'd become a myopic, small-brain, gray place where innovation and tolerance seldom happened. We're America BECAUSE of marketing and advertising.

Small minds prefer that other agencies or government institutions make decisions for them and everyone else. Small minds refuse to

believe in the power of choice and are scared of independent thinking. They fail to see that the best marketing, sales and advertising messages HELP us discern value and reward creative – albeit honest – marketing tactics. These marketing messages arm us with the power to make informed decisions on how we'll spend our money.

Smart, independent people know where the off button is located. They know that if it sounds too good to be true then it probably is. Smart people know that the opinions or responses people express publicly rarely mesh with what they do or believe privately. Perhaps, rather than resisting marketing, we should resist taking surveys, or believing their conclusions.

Solutions

Never one to simply complain about something without offering way to correct it, here are 10 ways to overcome marketing resistance and to nurture customer loyalty.

1. Do what you say you'll do. Start by just meeting the client's expectations, which generally aren't all that high after years of abysmal service and customer horror stories. Most customers are pleasantly surprised if you do what your marketing claims you'll do. For instance, show up! If you say you'll meet them or be somewhere on their behalf, follow through. Be on time and do the job completely. Honor your word, price, and positioning in the buyer's mind.

As a subset to the above, do what you're good at and don't offer services or products you aren't suited to deliver or improve upon. One-stop shopping can be a dangerous goal, since no one can be great in hundreds of different specialties.

If you're going to surprise your client, let the surprise be a positive one. Go beyond the expected by tweaking your delivery time, increasing the value to price quotient, product or service quality, level of professionalism and attention to detail.

2. Connect using real people. Answer the phone, cordially, succinctly – using a real person! It's gotten to the point where we almost expect to hear those mechanical or pseudo-human voices

instead of a breathing, cognitive person. Buck the automation trend by using live people to answer your phones during normal business hours instead of recorded messages or subjecting callers to voice mail hell. Return email promptly and personally. Not everything necessitates using email auto-responders.

3. Cult your business. People want something to believe in, and to give them meaning. Create something to believe in. What's the strongest set of words and images you can present that make your product or service appear to transcend the mediocrities of the marketplace. How does your offer serve as an anchor, or act as a god or goddess? What does it heal? What evil does it remedy? What sin does it wash away? How does it bring the buyer closer to paradise? What does it keep the buyer from losing? What makes it unique, genuine and worth the buyer's effort?

In culting your business, create fanatics who go to great extremes to get what you offer. Make it arduous to pass “initiation” or to enter the “inner circle” of special members. More importantly, make it easy for customers to evangelize on your behalf. Create an experience worth evangelizing with others. The highest indicator of a job well done is when a buyer puts their trust equity on the line for you by telling someone else to specifically choose your solution over everyone else's.

Use more testimonials, one of the purest forms of customer evangelizing, at every opportunity. Use testimonials on your web site, on your voicemail, on your business cards, in your brochures, magalogs, spec sheets, and recruiting materials. Anywhere they'll fit. Real testimonials attract more potential converts and retain current customers, by reminding them that they are part of something bigger, and that they've made a wise decision.

4. Leave your personal issues at the door. When you go to work, be there completely. Put 100% of your efforts into being present mentally and physically. Instead of thinking about the problems at home or with your relationships, or thinking about where you want to go to lunch or how you wish it was already quitting time, focus your energies on doing your job well and listening to what buyers are saying to you.

Additionally, the company's problems are not the buyer's problems. Don't air dirty laundry in front of customers. Not everyone is always going to get along all the time. Not every policy is going to make you or your team happy. Still, keep your internal infighting or disagreements with others hidden from your customers. Most buyers have their own dysfunctions to deal with. They are turning to you with the hopes that you, your product, service or expertise will help to ease or eliminate those problems. If you're not feeling positively passionate, fake it until you do.

5. Treat buyers with respect. Don't talk down to them. Constantly educate them on how to best use your offerings. Keep them informed of changes. Go easy on the hype and let your track record, quality and consistency do the selling. In return, demand that each buyer respect your time, expertise, value and employees.

For those customers who refuse to act like professionals, refer them to others with lower standards, and replace them with customers who are willing to consent to mutual respect. Additionally, allocate more time and options to your best buyers and be willing to walk away or phase out buyers who no longer fit your organization.

6. Be unusual where usual is expected. Look at your industry norms and find 5 to 10 areas where you can innovate beyond the ordinary way of doing things. For instance, in my creative marketing workshop, I challenge my clients to "-est" their business. Specifically, I have them write down 5 areas where they can claim your products, services or entire company is the most extreme in compared to the rest of the sector. People like extremes. They want the biggest or smallest, the most expensive or the cheapest, the purest or the dirtiest. What are five "-ests" that you can use to showcase your uniqueness and meaningful point of differentiation?

7. Get business for your buyer, or for your buyer's buyers. Earlier in the book, you learned about distribution shifting and how it can radically improve your sales success and market penetration rates. Now, consider how your business can act as a natural conduit for developing sales on your customer's behalf. Think about ways to develop referral systems for your buyers. Find out who they consider to be the ideal customers and develop multiple channels where people can go to connect with potential prospects.

Look at blogs and Friendster type tools that create online referral communities. A small POS display that says “Next time you’re in the market for XYZ, we recommend you ask for Company Z by name. You’ll be glad you did” is powerful way to effortlessly channel new business to your clients. It might be pure goodwill, or part of a reciprocal joint venture, where they do they same for you. Another simply strategy is to make extra business cards publicly available of those customers who you’re trying to help. Reciprocity is a powerful tool, because what goes around usually comes around.

8. Give buyers valuable information to help build their businesses.

Think of their ultimate outcomes instead of just your product or service. By providing exceptional information to others, not just conventional marketing collateral, but really good stuff with no strings attached, you instantly begin to position yourself as an expert and resource. People buy from experts more than they do marketers. What ever you create and give to them, make it something they'll use and appreciate every day and show to others.

9. Provide the best service they've ever had. Be world-famous by empowering trained staff to make decisions without your approval and constant micro-management. Train your staff to deliver friendly, knowledgeable and proactive service. Baptism by fire is a risky training technique. Everyone is responsible for sales and marketing. That’s why everyone should be trained to know the intricacies of your offers, how to work through worse-case scenarios, and to stay positive even when annoying, arrogant people try to bring them down.

10. Provide service beyond the sale. Help your buyers buy more by building a back-end into your business model. Start with planned follow up. Show buyers how to get the most from each purchase. Make it easy for them to purchase more and purchase more often. The more intuitive it is to use your solution the more deeply it becomes integrated into the buyer’s life. The more uses a buyer has for your offer the more intricately woven it becomes into the every day tapestry of who they are and how they do things. This multi function, ease of use and transparent level of service makes leaving, switching, or trying other competitors painful, unpleasant, time-consuming, and guilt-producing.

11. Remember that buyers fall into two distinct groups, the do-it-yourselfers and the you-do-it-for-them-ers. Cater to both groups. To provide additional service for those who want to do-it-themselves, create educational tools and regular upgrades that lengthen the product or service life cycle. Simplify your systems and go to great lengths to make it easy franchise your systems and create do-it-yourself manuals that are a joy to read and easy to understand.

For those buyer who prefer that you do it for them, build continuity programs into each sale. Ask if they would like to participate in auto-debit programs, life-time upgrade programs and we'll do it for you insurance policies. Reinforce the "Peace of Mind", and "Always be Current" cards. People will pay a premium for the ability to put their problems in someone else's hands.

A Final Note...

Use this important formula to overcome resistance and higher loyalty:

Attitude + Action + Consistency = Relevancy & Repeat Business.

Break the formula down and you'll get it.

Attitude: As discussed in earlier chapters, your attitude towards life impacts more than just marketing. It impacts everything. Rather than zeroing in on the "can't do" within your business or industry, train your employees to have an attitude of "What CAN we do?" and "What will it take?" that is personified through your behaviors and actions.

"What CAN we do to attract more business?"

"What will it take to best service our clientele?"

"What CAN we do to retain more of our best internal and external customers?"

"What will it take to make our delivery of service even better than yesterday?"

"What CAN we do to best leverage our small marketing budget?"

"What will it take to complete our marketing objectives on time and on budget?"

Action: Faith without works is pointless. Give yourself and your entire staff the mandate to act on their new marketing know how and customer retention skills. This goes for you too. If an opportunity comes along for you to exploit a new trend or respond to new suggestions that will positively impact the organization, have the courage to act.

Consistency: Be consistent in your message, your tone, your service, your positioning, your doctrine, your core proposition and your attitude. Know who you are and what your organization stands for in the marketplace. Follow these principles everyday, not just when you feel like it or the spirit moves you. Inconsistency breeds confusion. No one wants to be part of a confused, unstable relationship. Especially your customers.

Brian Norris specializes in helping companies and associations to sell more, lead better and stay positive by providing ultra-premium training and coaching in the areas of marketing, management and motivation. He is the author of the Creative Sales and Marketing Manual and is available on a limited basis for on site workshops, seminars and consulting. To reach Brian call 954-236-4834 or email info@briannorris.com.