

Four Secrets of Marketing Communications in a Crowded World

by Ron Black, The Mentor Group

Overload. That's how most of us describe our daily lives—communication overload. We are each subjected to hundreds of messages everyday—e-mail, radio, TV, packaging, logos, labels, banners, junk mail, telemarketers, billboards,... the list goes on and on. Look around your environment. How many advertising, marketing, or brand imaging messages do you see right now?

Fortunately, most of us have learned to ignore the clutter. Unfortunately, our customers have developed the same ability—seeing and hearing only those things they are selfishly (and rightly so in my opinion) interested in.

This implementation guide is provided as an introduction to the process of communicating in a crowded world. And while the material demands literally volumes more, this guide is designed for the busy person, in this busy world. Creating effective marketing communications requires both skill and knowledge. Knowing what to do is not enough, one must ply the trade to master it. The essentials listed here can be used to go it alone, or serve as a screening tool when judging the effectiveness of other materials.

Please remember that while this abbreviated guide is directed towards the written communication process, by extension, it all applies to all media including electronic, print, broadcast, personal sales, sales letters, presentations, small and large group talks, billboards, web pages, etc. You see, the primary marketing communication goals are all the same: to get noticed; to be understood; and to persuade. These can be broken down into the four elements that every effective communiqué must address.

Secret #1: The headline does 80% of the work.

Get the headline right and you're on your way! Why? You've got to get your prospect's attention. You may have the best solution in the world, but if your prospects won't invest more than a glance, they'll never take the time to learn the facts. The headline does two jobs: it stops them mid-stride, and it makes a promise: "There's something in here you'll want to know about!" Here are some tips of how to create an effective headline.

First of all, remember that your audience is appropriately selfish with not only their money but also with their time and attention. We need a headline that will cut through a crowded environment, stopping them in their tracks, with self-serving potential. To that end, headlines that work now, quite probably have worked since the dawn of commerce. The following headline starters force your thought process into serving the prospect's needs. Pick one or two that you think you can work with and place each at the top a blank page.

How to _____. The secrets of _____. For the _____. _____ ways to _____. Finally, _____. If you are _____, you can _____. Warning! _____ Don't _____ until you _____. Never _____ again.

Your headline may not look like any of these when you are done, and that's OK. The point is, we want them to work like these—appealing to the emotional and innate interests of your targeted audience.

Turn your creativity meter up to a 9 and your judgment meter down to a 2. Now write! Fill in the blanks with your products' or services' benefits (the "what's in it for them"). Create ten or twenty headlines. Now it's time to get emotional. Pick your favorites and rewrite them for emotional impact and polish. Screen them

on the basis of self-serving appeal. Don't use cute double meanings. We all like them, but they get in the way of fast, clear communications.

Secret #2: Justify the purchase decision.

This is the second most important element in effective marketing communications. Herein lies the heart of the matter: knowing that our prospects will always act appropriately selfishly, and providing for them the facts they can use to justify their positive purchase decision.

Don't expect that your prospects will see the obvious. While they are intelligent and the experts in their own needs, they can only view the world from their own vantage point. We simply provide the prospect ammunition to justify their decision to peers, supervisors, spouses, and others.

To create the purchase justifiers fill, complete the following statement as if you were your best customer: "I'm confident that this is a good decision because _____." It only takes one, but it is better to provide at least three solid, inarguable justifiers. Think in terms of your best customers during this process, and what they see in your product that serves their needs. Spend your marketing resources wisely, seeking more of your best customers.

Secret # 3: Be adequately credible and no more.

If you are to incite positive action, your message must be credible. Those who study persuasion teach us that believing the messenger is fundamental. While we must maintain a credible poise in all communications, excessive effort can be damaging. Prospects run from those they deem untrustworthy, too slick, or over-selling. The rule here is to provide adequate credibility and no more. To be credible, simply be honest. Be fit for purpose. Be business-like. Maintain an appropriate level of formality and politeness. Be confident, but not arrogant. Slow down. Genuinely accept the other's point of view. Display your credentials. Never break the rules, unless you can break them with gracious class.

Secret # 4: End with the call to action.

Always clearly ask for the order (or their commitment to the next step). No marketing or sales communication is complete unless your objective is realized, so show your prospect how to proceed. For the moment, you've got their attention, you've given them all the justification they need, and they've judged you and your message as credible and worthy. Now is the time to gain their commitment to the next step. Make your request compelling, low risk, and easy to accomplish and you'll reach the top even in a crowded marketplace!

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Author information:

Ron Black is an author, business consultant, and international speaker and trainer. He works with top managers who want to move their organizations to new levels of performance and entrepreneurs launching new products and services.

800-381-8686
ronblack@thementorgroup.com
www.thementorgroup.com

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