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Four Marketing Questions To Ask Yourself

By Rick Alpern

You're busy. I get that. There are clients to see and things to do. But at some point, you might want to stop and ask yourself these questions. Questions you have likely asked before.

These are what I like to call, "easy-to-ask, but-sometimes-hard-to-answer" questions. Most, if not all, of these here should be ***discussed and hashed out with key personnel in a formal setting*** so that you are making solid choices founded in as much fact as possible. ***Do not do this on your own.*** I am fairly certain that you are always looking for content for your staff meetings. Well here is enough for at least two of them!

1. "When our current or potential customer thinks of our company, what is the first thing that probably comes to mind?"

Try this exercise: Cut and paste 10 iconic brand logos down the left hand side of a sheet of paper numbering them 1-10. In the 11th and 12th positions add in your logo. Then, pass out the sheet to the group and ask them to write down the first thing they think of when they see each logo. If you use truly iconic brands, you should get a lot of similar answers. For example, when most people see the Volvo logo, they immediately think "safety." A majority of people think "overnight delivery" when they see the FedEx logo. You get the point.

When it comes to your logo at number 11, ask your staff the same question: What is the first thing that pops into your mind when you see your company's logo. Odds are you will get a plethora of answers.

At number 12 ask your staff to write down what they think is the first thing that pops into a potential client's mind when they see your logo. Again, you will likely get multiple answers.

This exercise is often a wakeup call for many of our new clients. They are astounded by the lack of consistent answers. Their "Instant Image" is often different among their employees as well clients.

2. "Where do you want to be three years from now?"

Before beginning our brand development process with clients, we spend quite a bit of time with leadership trying to get as specific as possible. We ask questions, discuss and come up with three to five solid, MEASURABLE metrics. This is so important. Before you charge off and start trying to position or rebrand your company, it is imperative to know where you are trying to end up. Knowing where you want your company to be in a few years acts as a guide or kind of a gut-check when making brand decisions. It can help you answer other questions like, "If I go after this type of customer, does it help get me to where I want to be in a few years?" Or, "If I position my company in a particular way, does it help us reach the goals I've set for three years from now?" Do not fall into the trap of saying you want your company to be "bigger" or you want to be thought of as the industry leader. These are vague and often nebulous descriptives. Be tough on yourself. Make the goals measurable and definable. The more specific you can be, the better.

3. "Who is my target customer?"

If you answer, "everyone," you may be right ... but you are also wrong. You likely want anyone to be a customer ... to pay money for your services. But you need to focus in on speaking to a core target customer. This will allow you to tighten your messaging because you will know exactly who you are trying to appeal to. Don't worry about being too targeted. If you are focusing on the right customer, your core customer, it is very likely that

the messaging you craft will also resonate with your secondary and tertiary customers. To crystallize your core target customer, list out all the descriptives you can think of. The longer the list, the better. And don't worry about political correctness. Again, doing this in a staff meeting will yield the best list. Once the list is complete, start eliminating the less important descriptives and cut the list to five descriptives that paint a clear picture of your core target customer. This exercise gets more difficult as you narrow the list. But it also generates great discussions about what is important and what is not. You may be surprised how helpful this is both from a marketing and sales perspective.

4. "What benefits do my core target customer look for when choosing a company like mine?"

There are likely a number of reasons why your core target customer buys from you. List all of them out. Prioritize the top five. Now look at your competition and try to estimate who does the best job at delivering each of these top five benefits sought by the core target. Where does your company rank in delivering on these top five benefits sought? Is there a benefit sought that your company can own in the mind of the core target? Can you position the benefit in such a way that it is memorable or sticky? There are lots of examples out there. Miller Lite did an amazing job of owning two highly sought after benefits by their core target. Their core wanted true beer flavor and did not want to feel bloated after a few cold ones. I'm sure their (super sticky) tagline already popped into your head: "Tastes Great. Less



Filling." You will remember it forever. This works for financial companies too. Charles Schwab's "Talk to Chuck" positioning did a terrific job of letting core customers know that Schwab had evolved into far more than a transaction-based, low-cost alternative. OakPath, a small, private investment advisory firm located in Northbrook, Illinois has a memorable tagline that smartly positions their company on a key benefit sought by their core target: They desire to retire with enough money to live well. Their tagline: "Retire Ready." It is short, memorable and spot on.

I mentioned at the beginning of the article that these are, "easy-to-ask, but-sometimes-hard-to-answer" questions. And, the questions will lead to other questions. But the answers will produce better marketing strategies and tactics. And that will generate more sales.

For over 25 years, Rick has worked in the advertising, sales and marketing fields and currently serves as President of Single Source Marketing in Danvers, Massachusetts. He is an avid believer in asking questions and listening to clients in order to achieve the best results. Visit SingleSourceMarketing.com for more information.