

MAKE IT EASY TO SELECT YOU: BE BETTER, NOT DIFFERENT

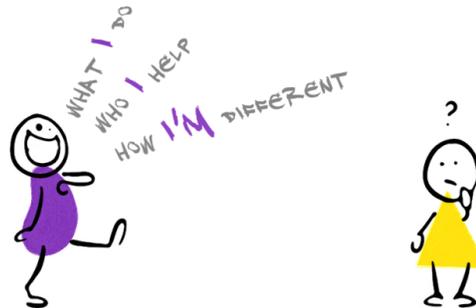
According to commonly accepted marketing best practices, the essence of marketing is telling the world how your firm is different from similar firms. The most popular formula for doing this goes as follows:

- What you do
- Who you serve
- How you are different from other firms.

It's easy to see why this became the standard best practice; it seems to make sense. Yet, in practice this standard positioning formula falls short. When trying to grow your business, your goal isn't to explain what you do; your goal is to generate more or better clients and higher profits. The conventional wisdom leads you astray.

Part 1 – Clients Don't Want to Talk About You

Perhaps that's why so many professionals complain about marketing costing so much while accomplishing so little.



Logical Isn't Always Effective

It's not that the formula above isn't logical. It's that prospects hear something completely different.

You say: **WHAT** you do. **WHO** you serve, and **HOW** you are **DIFFERENT**.

Prospects hear: what **YOU** do, who **YOU** serve, and how **YOU** want to talk even more about **YOU**.

What results is a big disconnect because the prospect cares about their business, not yours. We'll see in a moment how this disconnect has larger implications for growing your firm than you realize.

Misplaced Faith in "Best Practices"

Marketing best practices reflect what most people do rather than what is most effective. More than 15 years of interviewing hundreds of customers from dozens of clients led me to some powerful insights. Chief among these insights is that most professionals don't know the real reasons their best clients buy from them. It's hard to see yourself the way others see you. They know they are valued, but they don't have an accurate handle on why.

These professionals end up marketing why they think clients select them rather than why those clients actually do.

The Most Expensive Miss

What really hurts is that marketing is the single, most-powerful engine for growth you have. More powerful even than sales. Great marketing costs no more than mediocre marketing, sometimes less. The ROI is huge.

Better execution isn't the answer. While the everyday practice of marketing increasingly involves technology and tools, the biggest opportunity generally comes from an idea, not more skillful execution of ever more complex tactics. Words and tactics matter, but ideas matter more.

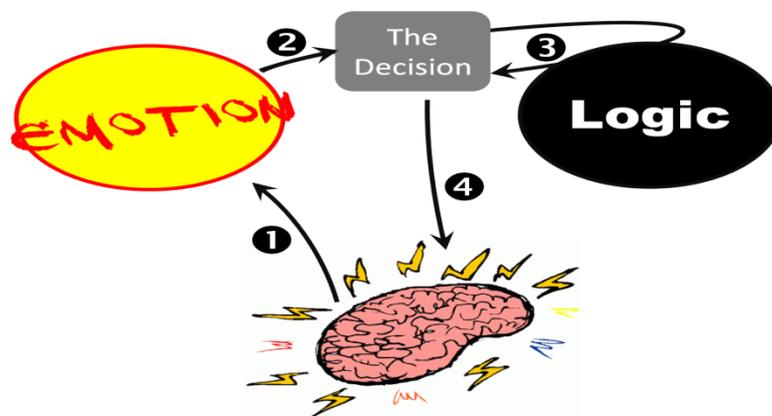
Try to see marketing as solving a problem rather than as a set of tasks to be executed. To be effective, you must precisely define the problem your marketing aims to solve. Therefore, defining the right problem is critical.

There are a lot of “experts” invested in the status quo. The good news is your new guide is common sense. Once the switch flips in your thinking, you'll never view your business development process the same. You will reap the benefits of more effective marketing, and—maybe for the first time—see a clear connection between your marketing, business development, and the rest of your business.

Your clients will thank you most of all.

The Science of Decisions

Up to this point, I've focused on what you shouldn't do. Successfully generating consistent growth for your firm requires you know what to do.



First, we'll take a slight detour into the emerging field of neuro-economics to examine how your prospects make decisions.

[Study](#) after [study](#) consistently shows people make decisions emotionally, and then rationalize that decision using a process called post-hoc rationalization. According to Raj Raghunathan of the University of Texas, post-hoc rationalization is found whenever we make decisions; “We are ruled by our emotions first, and then we build justifications for our response.”

This idea shapes the way you market your firm. It's an idea that costs you very little, but requires that you to be willing to fly against the conventional wisdom.

“The earlier you make the emotional connection the better, because once [the buyer has] decided they like a particular option, the more difficult it is for them to backpedal. Their thinking falls in line with their emotions.”

Prof. Raj Raghunathan

Think about your own experience. When you connect emotionally with a particular product, service, or firm, your brain is exceptionally good at cherry-picking the data that supports that decision.

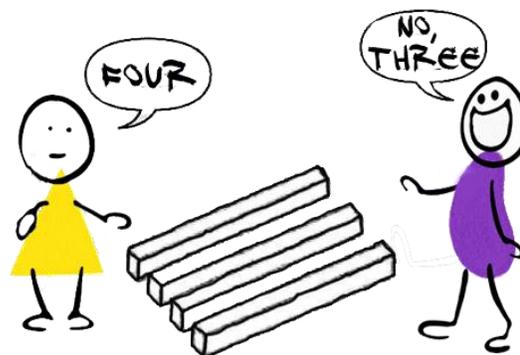
What about those times when you struggle with a decision? You go back and forth over all the information you've collected, weighing the various factors again and again. Surely, that must be logic ruling the day, but it's not. Generally, indecision is a sign one has failed to connect emotionally with any of the options. By seeking out even more information, we typically wind up making our decision even harder. Often we end up making no decision.

In fact, USC neuroscientist Antonio Damasio notes that people who lack emotions due to brain injuries often have trouble making any decision.

I'm not advocating sneaky persuasion techniques. As you'll see below, if you are a great choice for a prospect, re-thinking your marketing in light of how the prospect makes decisions can get them to “Yes” more quickly, with greater certainty, and with less emphasis on what you charge.

You can't grow your firm when your prospects choose someone else or decide to “do nothing.”

Part 2 – Clients Don't See Like You Do



Your prospective client wants their business to be a healthy, growing, profit-making machine. Whether you sell copy machines or accounting services, when you connect your work to specific improvements in their business, they hang on your every word.

Clients don't care about how you're “different,” the details of your products and services, or even how much expertise you have. Each of these cornerstones of conventional marketing figure much less prominently into your prospect's decision to select your firm than you think.

Why Being “Different” Doesn't Matter

Clients care about why you are the best choice for improving their business, not how you are “different.” Further, when you talk about you, you're selling. The entire business development process becomes more unpleasant for you and the prospect.

Why Your Products & Services Are Secondary

Charles Revson, founder of Revlon, said it best:

“In the factory we make cosmetics; in the drugstore we sell hope.”

Your clients are generally seeking to sell more of their widgets while earning a higher profit on each one. They accomplish this by making their widget a better solution to their customer's problem. Link what you do to their customer's business and you become a partner, not a vendor. Your products and services are merely your means for delivering against your promise. Competitors, even with identical offerings, can't deliver against your promise. By focusing on your client's business and their customers, the conversation you have with your client is one they can have only with you.

When you talk about how you're different, you make the conversation about you.

Why Expertise Is Overrated

The value of expertise is establishing credibility that you can deliver. It assures the prospect that they aren't just being sold.

Expertise is a threshold criterion: beyond some level, more doesn't increase your odds of being selected. It's important to know where that threshold is. For something very technical like brain surgery, the credibility threshold is mighty high. Thinking expertise is a contest rather than a threshold misunderstands decision-making and complicates your business development. Placing too much emphasis on expertise, often in the form of endless bullet points, frequently has the opposite of your intended effect, slowing or even derailing the client's decision.

The reason is simple. No one knowingly hires a professional lacking the requisite skills. Indeed, a 20-year attorney is a better choice than a first-year attorney in most cases. However, when the comparison shifts to a 10- or 15-year attorney, the client is hard to sway that there's a difference. If the prospective client didn't think you possessed the necessary expertise, they wouldn't be talking to you.

Once the client connects with you emotionally, they start looking to rationalize their decision (see *post-hoc rationalization* above). When you continue to pile on examples of your expertise, you are signaling they shouldn't make a decision yet. The situation gets messier. It's a classic case of talking past the sale. Instead of providing more reasons to select you, they move further from a decision.

In any case, you are generally more valuable when you avoid the “expert” label.

Better than an Expert

It's not that clients don't value expertise. What they value far more is applied expertise, specifically, how your knowledge and experience benefits their business. (You may notice a theme.) Being knowledgeable enough to authoritatively answer their questions makes you an Expert. Using your expertise and knowledge of your client's business to offer proactive advice which improves their business makes you an Advisor.

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Which would you rather be? More importantly, which would your client rather hire? Which one can they more easily see as an investment in their business? Which one harder to displace?

Experts are reactive; they answer questions. Advisors are proactive; they generate impact.

Part 3 – Improving Your Business with Common Sense



The Big Idea connecting your marketing and business development to the growth of your firm is how you benefit your client's business. Not what you do; what your client can do because of what you do. You can be extraordinarily effective in your marketing without being splashy or flashy.

Once you break free from the conventional wisdom you'll wonder how it ever held you so firmly in its grip. Common sense will become your guide.

When prospects see you as the clearly better choice, you win faster and more often.

Elevate Your Marketing and Business Development

The goal for your marketing and business development shouldn't be common metrics such as leads, views, likes, or downloads. It shouldn't even be merely winning the deal. Your goal should be winning more and better clients by making it easy for your ideal clients to select your firm. When you do, your sales cycle will shorten, price will become less of an issue, and your marketing and business development will be unusually effective where it matters most: with your ideal clients.

Next time a prospect asks "How are you different?," resist the urge to answer. Instead, tell them *why you are the best choice for them and their situation*. [The reaction will get your attention.](#)

When prospects see you as the clearly better choice, they don't merely select you; you win faster and more often because they see you as the easy, better choice.

Bruce La Fetra is a strategic marketing advisor to law, consulting, engineering, and other firms. His guidance leads to shorter sales cycles, higher revenue, and increases in pricing & profitability from working with more of their ideal clients.

