

7 Fast & Easy Ways to Improve How You Speak to Your Customers!

1) If you don't have a clear idea of what your company's brand is, figure that out first. All your other communications depend on it! Here's how.

Sit down with your staff and write a character sketch of your company, as if it were a person. Describe in detail the personality you're trying to create for the world. You'd be surprised how many employees have no idea that their company even has a personality (or brand). No wonder they can't communicate it to your customers or reinforce it.

Your type of business will drive the type of personality that is needed. A funeral home requires a much different personality than a sneaker manufacturer does.

Here are some examples: fun-loving, compassionate, empathetic, professional, funny, responsible, caring, humane, with-it, savvy, smart, cosmopolitan, urbane, considerate, well-travelled, experienced, knowledgeable, sporty, ethical, "green", socially responsible, friendly, cultured, helpful, creative, etc.

2) Find a tone or voice that accurately communicates your chosen personality. Develop your style and apply it consistently at every level and point of customer contact.

If you sell party favours, people taking orders over the phone should sound happy, lighthearted and friendly. Eager to help your customers have fun. Your ad materials should be lively and conversational. Colourful.

By contrast, if you provide legal or accounting services, your customers will expect a more staid, conservative and professional quality in the tone you use. This does not mean your communications have to be flat or boring, though.

3) Pay closer attention to other companies' literature.

Other companies' "junk mail" can be very insightful. You'll quickly learn to figure out what kind of personality they're trying to convey. Notice the words they use and the feeling you have when you read them. Pay particular attention to those offers that tempt *you* to respond. Apply what you learn

to improve your own business' communications by choosing the right words and altering the style to support the brand or image you've developed.

4) Apply the AIDA formula to all your communications

"AIDA" stands for "Attention Interest Desire Action". It's a basic principle of advertising that has been used for decades. Whether you're selling a product, service or even an idea, it's very helpful to understand and apply the AIDA formula in *all* your communications, not just in advertisements. Let's look at each component more closely.

Attention - *Who will be reading your communication?* Rather than say, "Dear Sir/Madam", can you be more specific and address your particular target market? For example, if you're introducing a new model of binoculars, it would be much more effective to write, "Calling all nature-lovers!". This establishes your audience and helps create rapport.

Interest - *Everyone is busy these days.* No one will take the time to read anything that's of no interest. You have a matter of seconds to get your readers' attention and pique their interest. In ads, headlines can identify the target, capture attention and generate interest – sometimes in just a few words. Your reports, emails, speeches and other communications can all benefit from such an approach.

Desire – *Human beings are self-interested.* We always want to know, "What's in it for me?" Your communications must always strive to answer that. Don't tell them what a great company you are. Explain how doing business with you will make their lives easier, save them money, etc. They don't care how long you've been in business. Do you understand the problems they face every day and can you offer them real solutions? Stress benefits over features. Appeal to their emotions. People act on emotion and then use fact to justify their action. Talk about *them*, not you. They will only desire your product, service or buy into your idea if you can show how it will help *them* directly.

Action – *It sounds so obvious, but asking for the sale or letting the reader know what's expected to happen next is the element most often overlooked.* If you do a wonderful

job grabbing attention, arousing interest, creating desire and then forget to mention the price, how to contact you or other important details, your communication will fail. It's helpful to "start with the end in mind", when planning your communication. When you proof your piece, make sure that the reader knows exactly what you wish him or her to do next. If your intention is unclear, rework it until there can be no doubt.

5) Put yourself in the reader's place.

Imagine that you're on the receiving end of the communication you're writing. Is it logical? Does it make sense? Or is it ambiguous and unclear? Too often, we're so knowledgeable about our business that we wrongly assume others will understand what we mean right away.

Avoid using acronyms and jargon that are specific to your industry. Write in short, simple sentences that are easy to read. Remember that the purpose of one sentence is to lead into the next one. Write as if you're having a one-on-one conversation with your reader.

6) A few words about websites

No one likes to be pitched. This is especially true in the online environment. The worldwide web was created for sharing information and communicating, NOT for selling. While e-commerce has been gathering tremendous momentum over the past few years, it remains an affront and an irritant to many online users. It's important to be aware of this if you currently have a website or are thinking of creating one.

Many companies make the mistake of simply cutting and pasting their corporate literature onto their website pages. Typically, this literature touts the company with little regard for the wants and needs of its potential customers. It imparts no useful information. It is "corporate chest-thumping" at its finest. And it is a total turn-off for internet users.

Websites must be easy to navigate, interactive and content-rich. In no other medium is it more important to adopt a

personal, one-on-one conversational tone. Yet so many websites fail to communicate properly because they don't understand the internet user's need for information and active participation.

Still others go too far the other way, and pay no attention whatsoever to how they present themselves online. Spelling mistakes, broken links, awkward navigation, too-small type on reverse backgrounds are big mistakes often made by the most reputable companies. These businesses wouldn't dream of issuing a catalogue full of such errors and graphic gaffes. Why do they think the online version of their corporate image so unworthy of their attention? Just because the web is supposed to be user-friendly, casual and conversational? That's no reason to be any less professional.

Take a look at your website, and make sure that it is helping, not hindering, your business. "Conversion" – the process by which browsers become buyers or active participants on your site – is another topic worthy of discussion in a separate issue. For now, it's enough to understand that if you can improve how you communicate online, you can boost your conversion rate.

7) Always proofread every communication, including email!

Start by using your "spellchecker" but be aware that it only finds words that are misspelled – not words that are used out of context. Only human eyes can find those (and even then, only if they're aware of what they're looking for!). If you don't trust your own spelling and grammar skills, have someone else look over your work.

Still unsure? Retain the services of a professional writer, editor and/or proofreader, especially if the communication will have a long shelf-life or be directed toward an outside audience. While it may seem like an unnecessary expense for something you should be able to do yourself, errors can cost you much more, in terms of embarrassment, damage to your image or the time and expense of reprints, correction notices, etc.



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