

What's the Most Important Word in Marketing?

Scott Ginsberg, *That guy with the nametag*

What's the most important word in marketing?

Free?

Why?

Truth?

Honesty?

Integrity?

At first glance, it seems like a simple question. But the more you think about it, the more complex it gets. One could probably argue any number of answers based on his beliefs, values or type of business.

But is there really one word that's more important than all the others?
One word without which your marketing efforts will be successful?

I recently surveyed dozens of marketing professionals, authors, consultants and small business owners on www.hellomynameisblog.com. The results included a wide range of words; from the emotionally charged to the pragmatic; from the right brain to the left brain and from the customer focused to the company focus. But all of the suggested "most important words in marketing" fell into one of two categories: Traditional Marketing or Modern Marketing.

Traditional Marketing: The Old School

Traditional Marketing used to be all about advertising. It was expensive, short lived, and had little to do with the Internet or word of mouth. Also, it aimed its messages at passive audiences. Leading expert and best selling author Seth Godin calls this "Interruption Marketing," in which the marketer talks directly to as many consumers as possible.

Now, although this traditional style of marketing has lost some of its prowess to the fierce competition of the web, it's still a powerful medium through which companies can reach their customers. Let's see which words the experts chose from this category.

NOTE: before you read the survey results below, take a minute to answer the question for yourself: **What do you think is the most important word in marketing?** Once you've made your decision, read on and see how your answer compares.

NEW

"NEW is probably the strongest word in marketing," explains Ronnie Horowitz from The TRIZ Journal. "People are attracted to new products like a magnet. Introducing new products on a constant basis is the best way to get attention and invaluable free publicity for your business."

WHY

Michael "The Success Doctor" Fortin believes the most important word in marketing is WHY. "It is much better to communicate why you are original, special or unique; why you are better, different or superior than competitors – not just the fact that you are. Imply your superiority by specifying as much as possible."

CUSTOMER

Sivaraman Swaminathan from Customer World says we shouldn't overlook the obvious word, CUSTOMER. "I think marketing has evolved because the focus is on the customer. The soul of marketing is the customer. Period. In marketing, you will fail even if you have greatest passion for the wrong target audience; you will fail if you don't know whom you should respect, and you will fail if you don't know which customer to trust."

YOU

Similarly, Robert Middleton from Action Plan Marketing said, "The most important word in marketing is YOU. That is, marketing needs to convey very clearly what's in it for the client or customer."

FREE

FREE was also touted by several experts as the most important word. Edward "Skip" Masland, owner of Web Solvers says "FREE was, is and will always be the most powerful word in marketing. It attracts eyeballs. It gets results and responses quickly. And marketers may not profit today – or tomorrow – but if they can generate a groundswell of interest from something free, they know they will profit sooner or later."

On the other hand, Bob Serling from Idea Quotient wrote an article claiming that FREE was the most dangerous word in marketing. "I've been advising businesses for nearly 20 years that a business model driven by attracting prospects through giving something away for free is almost always a model for failure. And it doesn't matter whether you use this model online or offline – it will nearly always fail."

LISTENING

Next, Karen from DeSign Matters explained that the most important word in marketing was something you DON'T say. "I think the word is LISTENING. A little time leaning back and listening quietly can save time, money and leave the client and customer feeling that someone truly heard what they were trying to say."

BECAUSE

Michael Daehn, author of **Marketing Ingenious** explained, "I read a case study about cutting in lines at a copy machines. The hypothesis was that the word 'please' would get the best response. But the results proved that the word 'because' received a much better response given that the word offered a reason to let someone cut in line. Therefore, we as marketers need to give customers a reason to buy."

RESULTS

Lastly, Michael Cage from Small Business Marketing Systems said the most important word in marketing was RESULTS. "Small businesses are often suckered into fluffy, fancy marketing concepts that sound great but produce absolutely nothing in the real world. If the business owner or marketing department can't tie what they do to results, likewise, they need to step back and get it right before passing go."

Marketing: The New School

20 years ago, nobody knew what the words “blog,” “RSS feed,” “personal branding,” “viral marketing” or “google” meant. But now – at the risk of sounding cliché – *the rules have changed*. Business is different. Customers are smarter. And marketing isn’t the same old run-a-bunch-of-ads-and-hope-people-buy-your-stuff system.

Now, it’s all about creating an emotional connection. It’s about being unforgettable, unbelievable and unique. It’s about providing an experience that’s so fantastic, customers not only remain loyal to you – but they tell all their friends to do the same.

Here’s what the experts said about the most important words in Modern Marketing.

RESPECT

It’s not surprising that Seth Godin – author of seven best selling books about how to make your business remarkable – always emails me back within 30 minutes. I drop him a line every once in a while to pass along an interesting website or, in this case, ask a question. He replied with a brilliant one-word answer: RESPECT. Period.

AUTHENTICITY

John More, owner of Brand Autopsy, maintained the most important word in marketing was AUTHENTICITY. “With the world becoming one gigantic ad, consumers today can sniff out anything that smells the least bit fake and inauthentic. Success will come truer and faster if companies can design products, programs, and services that are authentic in meaning, purpose, and delivery.”

Moore dug deeper on the topic of authenticity and explained that “Authenticity is usually a by-product of a purpose-driven business. And unfortunately, there ain’t enough businesses out there with the purpose of making a positive difference in the world.”

PASSION

Similarly, Tom Asacker from A Clear Eye says it’s all about PASSION. “Passion for one’s business and for one’s calling inspires and attracts people. They want to be to believe, to belong; to become. And that’s the essence of marketing today.”

Tom and John’s posts on the blog discussion generated high amounts of support from other experts. Laura from the Smart Musings blog agreed by saying, “John and Tom are right. Consumers can distinguish between authentic and inauthentic marketing. Authentic messages will strike a chord with them. That may encourage them to buy. And once they become a customer, then they may too become passionate about the product. And that is the ultimate goal of marketing: not just to have passionate employees, but passionate customers.”

TRUST

Another popular word was TRUST. Kevin Berringer from Reflections on Business Blog simply said, “No trust = no belief = nobody listens.”

EXPERIENCE

Then, Chris Ray from Interactively Speaking voted for the word EXPERIENCE, as in The Customer Experience. “I believe this word summarizes respect, authenticity, passion, results,

etc.” said Ray. “It ultimately decides whether or not a company succeeds.”

AROMA

Next, Jim Seybert from the Jim Seybert Company offered a most unusual suggestion: AROMA. “Brain scientists tell me that smell is the only sense that goes directly to the limbic lobe in our brains - and triggers nothing short of primal emotions. Marketers should pay attention to the ‘aroma’ of their brand. They need to identify the unavoidable, immediate and emotional reaction customers experience upon coming into contact with their brand.”

OPEN

Another intriguing response came from Nellie Lide of The New Persuasion Blog. Her word was OPEN. “You’ve got to be open. Open to others. Open to customers. Open to employees. Open to new. Open to old. Open to scrutiny. Open to derision. Open to joy. Open to different.”

TRUTH

George Silverman, author of *The Secrets to Word of Mouth Marketing* says it’s all about TRUTH. “Marketing has become synonymous with hype. The truth, compellingly told, is all you need. Just tell it in an interesting way, usually with a story. This allows you to tell the truth about your product and the truth about yourself.”

No Word

The last respondent of the survey was Sean D’Souza from Psycho Tactics. He decided to take the contrarian’s point of view. “There is no one single word that’s the most important in marketing. Making such a claim would be like saying your heart is the most important part of your body. I think we try to make things too simplistic. In reality, marketing is a series of things that coordinate together to create magic.”

It’s All In The Hunt

In case you haven’t already figured it out, the answer to the question “What’s the most important word in marketing?” is: *it all depends*.

Typical marketing answer, huh?

But ultimately, it’s not about the answer – it’s about the question. It’s about the creative thought process each businessperson goes through when he considers what the most important word in marketing is...to him.

Personally, I chose the word CONFIDENCE.

In other words, I want to instill confidence in the minds of potential customers that if they step onto *my* company’s front porch, they will be working with a credible, valuable, trustworthy individual whose unique school of thought will help them produce results.

But that's just me. That's how I roll.

Now, it's up to YOU to reexamine what "marketing" truly means to you and your company. In so doing, you will gain a better understanding about who you are, what you do and whom you do it for.

So, what's the most important word in marketing...to YOU?

(1,785 words)

© 2005 All Rights Reserved.

Scott Ginsberg is a professional speaker, "The World's Foremost Expert on Nametags" and the author of *HELLO my name is Scott* and *The Power of Approachability*. He helps people MAXIMIZE their approachability and become UNFORGETTABLE communicators - one conversation at a time. For more information contact Front Porch Productions at www.hellomynameisscott.com.

Cognovi Communications is the innovative thought and creative solutions company helping clients achieve memorable, meaningful and measurable marketing. From strategy and planning, to content, design, new media and web/technology services, Cognovi offers a full array of services to suit the needs of small-medium sized businesses. Cognovi's offices are virtually located in Atlanta, Dallas, St. Louis, and Washington DC with headquarters in Houston. For more information, visit the company's website at www.cognovi.net