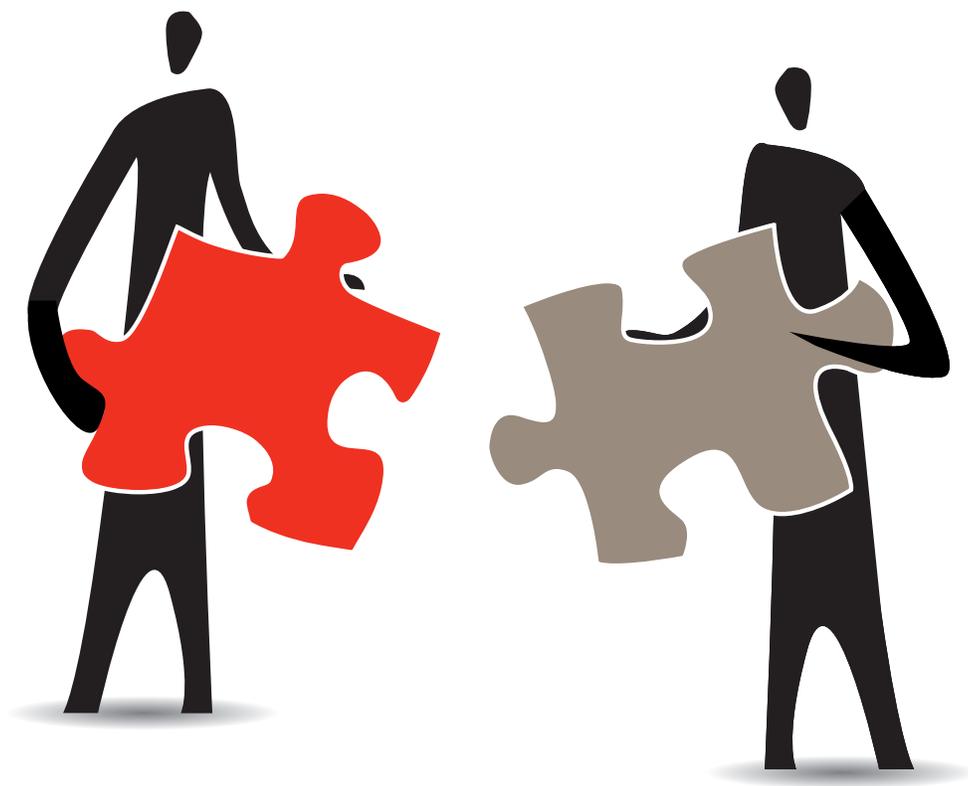


What Good Dating and Marketing Have in Common

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If there's one thing to remember about today's consumers, it's this: They've seen it all. As a result, the modern courtship of a potential customer is a more complex process than ever. People want to get a sense of who you really are. They also need to compare notes with trusted associates and through social-network connections.

Here are a few key perspectives to keep in mind as you approach the prospects that best fit your individual strategy for business growth and development.

You need to date before you marry.

Except in cases of extreme inebriation and/or lack of judgment, no one would seriously start off a first date with the question: "So, will you marry me?" However, this is pretty much how push marketing has been conducted for decades.

For decades, companies would simply push mass-market messages to a broadcast audience – expecting them to buy their product or service on impulse. In the days when advertising was more of a novelty, it worked quite well.

Today's consumers have been over-hyped ad nauseam. They also have more choices than ever before, available through an unprecedented array of marketing and purchasing channels. The key for savvy marketers is to enable prospects to get to know their offerings – what's in it personally for them – and what the company behind it is really all about.

During this "dating" process, an enterprise needs to provide as much relevant, fresh information as possible to prospective customers and followers. This can be facilitated by establishing a blog, by offering white papers like this one on key industry issues, and by disseminating benefit-oriented press releases on your latest achievements and advances.

When this level of interactive exchange takes place, people will take some time to get to know you, to talk to friends and associates about you, and to start feeling comfortable enough to think about someday marrying (i.e. buying from) you.

The need for continual communication.

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder” might be true for very short periods of time, but prolonged absences can wreak havoc on a relationship. Smart marketers are realizing that the art of ongoing communication is more important than ever, and that it also needs to be a two-way street.

While it’s certainly important to get your message across, the old method of pushing an overload of information at consumers is no longer effective. Fortunately, the Web 2.0 world offers a variety of ways to impart useful information in digestible chunks.

One such communications tool is a company blog. This is a particularly valuable channel since your enterprise can interact with your tribe of customers and prospects in meaningful ways. The idea is to set up an open and honest feedback loop – where people are comfortable enough to discuss both the advantages and flaws of your product/service relationship. This leads to the kind of interchanges that help to elevate your products, services and brand image across your tribe of followers.

Another highly effective way to stay in touch with people who have opted-in to receive your messages is through a needs-based DRIP email marketing campaign. A Web 2.0 tool that can be accessed for less than \$25 per month, email marketing enables you to send prospects relevant information – while they’re in research mode – according to a pre-planned automated schedule. This is especially helpful for big-ticket sales processes with long lead times.

Actions speak louder than words.

A dozen roses every now and then is a nice gesture, but the actions that solid relationships are built on are often the little things that are key to our daily lives.

Likewise, a company can commission a great ad saying how much they value their customers and also send them a nice holiday gift. However, the way that company walks the walk during the course of everyday business is really what makes it a valued supplier and resource.

The opportunities to do this are quite varied. Maybe it’s how you anticipate your customers’ ordering needs in a proactive way, or how you use direct feedback to tailor product features for specific customers. The only real way to show your customers how you feel is to treat them with the utmost respect and attention on a day-to-day basis – with the goal of providing a ‘wow’ experience at every level of interaction they have with your company.

The importance of being real.

In a dating relationship, it's natural to want to present yourself in the best possible light. But even if you talk a good game, over the long term you can't be something you're not. Yet, many companies try to do this via on-the-surface advertising and "branding" initiatives.

Increasingly, post-modern marketers are finding the most important brand attribute is to be real. By being genuine and approachable from the very beginning, marketers and enterprises will attract and retain tribe members who follow them for what they are – not for what they appear to be. A couch potato dressed in running gear is, in essence, still a couch potato. You can only fool someone for so long.

The need to be unique.

It's the age-old question: If you'd like to have a relationship, how do you get someone to notice you? The answer actually depends on who you want to notice you.

In a marketing environment with no shortage of choices, an average product, service or enterprise just doesn't cut it anymore. In fact, being average today is a losing strategy, since only the standout brands get noticed and talked about by the public.

However, being unique doesn't mean you need to be the most outrageous and in-your-face company on the planet. If your target customers are looking for quality and dependability, how do you kick that up a notch? If they're looking for customization, what can you do to streamline and empower that process?

One thing is for sure. If your offering is just like everyone else's, you will not stand out in a crowd – and it's certainly not hopeful for starting a relationship with the prospects you deem most valuable.

The need to fish in the right waters.

If a devout, church-goer wants to meet someone with similar values, going to the local dirty-dancing club is probably the wrong strategy. Likewise, a wild, fun-loving sort will probably be quite disappointed with Bingo Night at the church hall.

Marketing is the same way. The most important part of your strategy is to first figure out who your target audience really is and then find the channels that lead directly to the kinds of customers who will value your product and service offerings.

The fact is, some enterprises waste a lot of money on the equivalent of buying drinks for the wrong person. For instance, by producing ads that try to position them as the coolest company on the block.

Just figure out where your messages should be – and be all over it. And if what you really need to become is the head of the Spring Breakfast committee, then so be it.

TribalVision is a marketing consulting firm whose mission is to help small to midsize companies market smarter. As a marketing department for hire, TribalVision is a flexible, cost-effective alternative to the traditional marketing solutions available to the business community. The TribalVision value-add includes the crafting of strategy, channel-mix optimization, tactics implementation, executive leadership services, and the building of highly differentiated brands.

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