



From the series for MAGIC Magazine

Part III: Communications & Marketing

In the first two articles of this series, we've discussed a model in the shape of a tetrahedron for building ourselves a strong business. Mission and purpose form a strong base and the sides are made up our team, leadership, and strategy. All of the sides support one another, none stands alone, and all are equally important. However, once you've built all of these elements, your pyramid still remains hollow. We will fill it with specific jobs that must be attended to in order to make and keep a business strong: communications and marketing at one level, cashflow management at another, legal issues at a third, management systems for handling all the tasks of the business, and at the top of the heap, your show itself, which is your product.

This month, I'd like to talk mostly about communications and marketing. One of the prime axioms of marketing is that "it's all marketing." Everywhere your business makes contact with the outside world, you are marketing, because marketing is what ultimately determines your reputation, sales, and success. The best marketing is to have a truly great show that people want to tell their friends about and that encourages them to do so. You've probably heard that the best form of marketing is good word of mouth. This is so true that there are whole books written today on "Buzz Marketing," teaching marketers how to generate lots of good word of mouth.

Traditionally, marketing is a three-step process by which a business first determines a need in the market, then comes up with a product to fill that need in a new and better way, and then, finally, finds the best way to let that market know about the product so they can buy it. Most magicians have a hard time with this approach because they've already created their product without regard to what needs there might be in the market. They are left trying to find a market for a product that may not fit any particular market. If they are lucky, their product does fit some particular market, and they can pursue that. Traditional markets for magicians include private parties, corporate parties, trade shows,

cruise ships, theatrical shows, magic events... and I'm sure you can think of a few more.

I tend to think those who have been most successful in our business are those who have reinvented the idea of the magic show to fit a market where it hadn't previously been. David Copperfield reinvented what the illusion show was and then came up with a new way to present magic on television, and then a particular way of dominating the touring theatrical market which had never been accomplished by any previous magician. Penn & Teller created an irreverent, "bad boy" kind of theatrical magic show that wasn't even billed as a magic show for a very long time. When Siegfried & Roy arrived in Las Vegas back in the late '60s, they were told universally that "magic will never work here," but 25 years later, their style of magic became the quintessential Las Vegas entertainment. All of these artists took magic into markets where it hadn't been, in new ways, and solved needs those markets had for a particular kind of entertainment product.

One of the first things any aspiring ad writer learns is the difference between features and benefits; features are nice, but the emotional hook that really "sells" a customer **is the package of** benefits the product and its features will bring the buyer. A feature of your show might be that it "leaves them laughing," but the benefit of that to your client might mean that this "puts them in a mood to buy" the client's product. At a private party, you might be able to produce a feat of mentalism that will leave them totally astounded, but the benefit to the host of the party, who is paying you, would be that no one there will ever forget that evening's experience and who brought it to them.

One of the exercises I have students at my workshops do is to make a list of the ten best features of their acts. They list things like "my ring routine" or "the live dove productions." It's important for their marketing efforts to then be able to link **each** feature to a benefit. A trade-show magician might list one of his features as "I start by levitating an audience volunteer." The benefit linked to this would be "This usually gathers quite a large crowd outside your booth," which is what the trade-show buyer wants. I suggest you try this exercise yourself. You may find it more difficult — and enlightening — than you would imagine.

Another basic of marketing and sales is the idea of the Unique Sales Proposition (USP). This means

developing a statement of what your particular business or show does, the benefits it provides, and how it is different from all its competitors. If you are doing a generic magic act, you'll remain at the level of generic magicians everywhere, and get paid exactly what your competition gets paid for similar shows. However, if there is something about you and the benefits you can deliver that no one else can, you'll become more attractive in the marketplace and be able to command much higher prices. A good example of a strong USP is that of Volvo, whose slogan and reputation is: "Safety First. Always." When you think of Volvo, you think of a safe car, don't you? If I wanted to buy my son or daughter a car I knew they would be safe in, chances are I'd look at Volvos. That's their USP. What's yours?

Branding happens when we associate an idea or image with a particular company or product. It seems to be a truism of the human mind that we "get" things only after we've been exposed to them at least three times. In marketing a Las Vegas show, for instance, you want to make sure your potential customers will be exposed to your sales message at least three times before they make their decision about what show they want to see while they are in town. So you might buy video commercial time on the giant screens in the baggage claim area at the airport, as many signs on taxis as you can afford, at least one billboard on a road leaving the airport, and large ads in the entertainment magazines. That way, you are assured of at least those three exposures so your message will "sink in" to the consciousness of that potential customer.

If the message contains many of the same elements each time the potential customer sees it, they will associate all of the ads with your product. However, if they all contain different images, styles, and details, the customer won't associate them, and you won't gain the cumulative effect of having been seen three times. Wise marketers repeat key images, phrases, and styles throughout all of their advertising and publicity. You should, too. As the folks at Nike say, "Just do it!"

Like everything else in your business, your marketing will work best for you if it fits in with and supports all of the other parts of the business. It's especially important to make sure your marketing ploys are consistent with the principles you espouse for your company.

I always have to laugh when spam gets through to me offering a new mortgage product. One of the primary things you want in a lender is honesty and integrity, but the spammer uses an obviously fake e-mail address and hides their marketing message behind some phoney subject. Who would trust such a person with a 10-cent loan, let alone the future of their homes?

Roy Williams, author of the popular *Wizard of Ads* books on marketing, wrote in a recent newsletter: "Hype is dead. If you're a business owner needing advice about marketing in the new millennia, here's all you really need to know: Say it straight. Say it real. You'll do fine."

The art of marketing is changing rapidly as our global, internet-savvy society changes. People are *so* bombarded with advertising from all directions that they have grown immune to hype. Ads that used to sell products well now just turn their potential customers off, because they sound like hype and are therefore seen as being untrustworthy.

If hype doesn't sell, then what does? Detail.

When I first started working with Jeff McBride, I discovered that if I began telling a friend or business colleague about him and described him as "a great magician who has won nearly every award in magic, the most innovative and theatrical artist I've met in a long time," their eyes rapidly glazed over. However, I got quite a different response if I said: "He's a performance artist who works with masks, mime, and magic to create strangely riveting performance pieces. For example, he does this thing where he wipes away all this white-face Kabuki make-up he's been wearing, and it somehow immediately appears back on his face, but now it's a mask. He grabs the mask and tries to wrench it off his face, finally pulling it down around his knees and attempting to throw it away. But it leaps back onto his face with so much force it knocks him to the ground..." Now my listeners almost invariably asked, "Where can I see this?" The details would sell the product, but the hype would not.

People love stories. Give them a great story in the context of your press materials, and you'll be giving them a gift. Perhaps the story you have to tell is of your own life or how you developed a particular piece of magic. Maybe you did magic for a famous celebrity and something funny came out of it. There is a basic principle of persuasion called the Principle of Reciprocity. Stated simply, it says that if I give you a gift — a story, for example — no matter how small, you will be more likely to want to return the favor... and perhaps hire me! But remember, if you do choose to tell stories, fill them with detail and keep it all true! No one wants to trust the fate of their business or party or whatever they might hire you for to someone they think is dishonest.

As I mentioned above, one of the primary things any marketing person will tell you is that "It's all Marketing." In our business, this is particularly true. Let's look at some examples.

Your *best* marketing is to do a great show. If your show is professional, fun, and exciting, people will spread the word to their friends, and the friends will

want to see you or hire you. Make sure that within the context of your show or act, you remind them of who you are. Say your name frequently and, at the end of the act, remind the audience to tell their friends.

Your business card is a primary tool for marketing. It may be the principal way many people learn how to contact you. Make sure it sends the message you want it to, and that it is designed to go with all of your other materials — your letterhead, brochure, promotional kit, video, etc. Also, be aware that business cards have two sides. You can put your own unique selling proposition or perhaps a small optical illusion on the back of your card. Remember, giving the gift of magic will inspire that reciprocity response and leave them feeling they want to return the favor.

Your first contact with many potential clients will be over the phone. Your phone manner will send them a message just by the way you — or your answering machine — says hello. I always try to imagine whoever might be at the other end is a long lost friend, or someone I know is calling to do something special for me. That way the person at the other end of the line can hear the smile in my voice, and feels as though they are dealing with someone who will make them feel better about whatever they have to talk to me about. Oh, and your answering machine presents you with a great marketing opportunity. Don't leave a boring generic message for your callers. Tell them who you are and what you do: "Hi, this is Tom the Magician. I've vanished from the office and am out helping someone have an amazing party right now, but I'd love to talk with you. Please leave me a message, and don't forget to tell me your phone number. I'll call you right back!"

Make sure you're sales letters go out on letterhead that looks like all your other marketing materials. If you have a slogan you've developed to help brand yourself, include it in the letterhead. If you do fun, comedy, up-tempo shows, your letterhead design should reflect that. If you do spooky, scary shows, the letterhead should reflect that. Remember, our goal is integrity. Make all the parts fit together and support one another.

Over the years, I've seen and developed quite a few promotional kits and brochures. I've come to the conclusion that there are four main things that every promotional piece needs, whether it is a brochure, press kit, video, or website. Those things are:

1. A good description of your show or act. This should include your unique sales proposition, letting the reader know what it is that sets you apart from all your competition. It should set a tone that is consistent with the show you present.

2. A list of all the different products they might be interested in, with short descriptions. For example, if

they can hire you to do close-up magic at parties, that might be one item. If you have a small platform show, that might be a second. If you do a special motivational lecture and show, that might be a third. This page is much like a page in a catalog,

3. You should provide either a bio or a good resume, telling them something interesting about yourself, including some of your credentials. I much prefer the bio here, but some magicians feel clients will want to see everything they've ever done, and that the resume looks more professional.

4. Remember how much you wanted to write hype about your show? Here's where you can include it, but it has to come from other people. Testimonials tell the potential buyer how wonder you are. They can take the form of a page of short quotes and the people who said them, a series of letters from former clients, or reviews and articles from newspapers, magazines, and other media. It is generally worthwhile to solicit testimonials wherever you can. When you do a job and the person who hired you comes to tell you how much they enjoyed the show, ask them for a brief letter on their letterhead, saying just that. Whenever possible, invite the press to your shows. Even a generally bad review usually has something you could place on a page of quotes. Remember, other people can say you were great and terrific and amazing, and it's just fine. If *you* say it, it sounds like hype or bragging. Generally, that won't help you.

The final thing any marketing or sales piece needs is a call to action. For most of this, the call to action can include our contact information. This should appear on *all* of your materials, unless they are to be given to an agent, in which case the agent's contact information should be included. I think most people miss a chance to make a sale when they just include "Contact" information, though. Why not make it a real call to action: "For more information or to book this show now, call this number," or if it's a website, "click here." Advertising and sales experts will tell you that the number one failure in designing advertising or making a sales call is the failure to ask for the sale, or to at least make some kind of call to action. Just asking for the sale can almost double your chance of making a sale!

Marketing is an endlessly fascinating subject for me, partially because it involves many of the same ideas as other parts of show business. How people perceive, how they are persuaded. For those of you really interested in building careers in magic, I suggest you start immediately reading some of the thousands of books out there on sales and marketing. In terms of building a successful business as a magician, the ability to sell your act or show is probably the second most important ability you can develop.