

SHIFTS TO UNLOCK YOUR MARKETING

Is your message failing to connect with customers? Apply these four paradigm shifts.

Did you know there are more than 1 million words in the seven books of the Harry Potter series? Seriously, I looked it up.

You see, before Harry, Ron and Hermione entered my daughter's life, it was difficult to get her to read a single word. A million was a pretty sweet upgrade.

Marketing should have this effect on people, drawing them into a message like a tractor beam, even if a bit reluctantly at first. Granted, you're probably not a world-renowned, bestselling author. But neither should your business messaging be like trying to engage a 10-year-old by reading from the family dictionary.

There are reasons that good stories connect with people, and a lot of those reasons apply to good marketing messages as well. The following four shifts in the way you approach your marketing follow the time-tested rules of storytelling. Apply them, and you will find a target customer who is, at long last, engaged.

NO. 1: SHIFT AWAY FROM THE MEDIUM... AND TOWARD THE MESSAGE

In 13 years helping small businesses connect with customers in Liberty Lake and Spokane Valley, perhaps the most common misconception people brought to me was about the publications we put out. Our team routinely won awards for the quality of our publications, and we had an incredibly loyal readership. The problem: Some advertisers translated this into viewing our publications as some sort of "Holy Grail." Advertise your business in it and — *voila!* — the customers would come a-runnin'! I wish it worked that way, but the truth is that the success of your advertisement depends far more on your message than my medium. The message is the story; the medium is the stage it's presented on. Don't get me wrong, questions like whether to invest in social media or print or email campaigns, etc., all have their places, but they are all *secondary* questions. Your absolute first priority is your message, which is what the next three shifts are about...

NO. 2: SHIFT AWAY FROM YOUR BUSINESS... AND TOWARD YOUR CUSTOMER

The temptation when telling the story of your business is to cast your business as the hero. Makes sense, right? Wrong. Donald Miller, CEO of Storybrand, says the fundamental "aha" moment in effective marketing is discovering that the protagonist of your messaging is your customer, not your business. "Your customer is Luke Skywalker, and you are Yoda," he says. Translation: If your marketing revolves around an attractive logo and bullet points about your business, then you are the hero of your

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message, and the person you are trying to reach has a harder time seeing how your story fits into their narrative. After all, your customer is the hero of her own story. She will only be engaged to the degree you enter into her story, not by asking her to enter into yours.

NO. 3: SHIFT AWAY FROM YOUR SOLUTION... AND TOWARD THEIR PROBLEM

If you only read the final chapter of a book, you are not going to connect with it in the same way as someone who traversed every page. How could you without first engaging in the conflict, struggle and pain that was finally resolved in the book's final pages? Marketing works the same way. Your potential customers engage at the conflict level, not the solution level. This is because they know you understand the problem as you help them taste and feel the pain it is causing. Too often we just market the solution ("We whiten teeth!") without first connecting to the felt pain ("Do you think twice before you smile?") Relating to the pain of the narrative connects your potential customer to the problem, prepares him or her for the solution and — just as importantly — builds credibility that the business offering the solution knows what it is talking about.

NO. 4: SHIFT AWAY FROM THE DETAILS... AND TOWARD MAKING AN IMPRESSION

Your messaging should focus on making an impression, not cementing a long-term relationship. So get to the point. Be creative, be funny, but don't waste words. Advertisements, social media posts and email campaigns are not consumed like a novel on a beach. You have mere seconds, so stay focused on the single most important point you have decided to make. There are so many things you will want to say, so many things people should know about you. You are going to have to be OK with throwing out most of them. Keep your message simple and clean, focused on making that singular impression. Hopefully, you will get a second date. Those other points you so desperately want to talk about will still be there when the time is right. The point is that she (that customer you are wooing) will still be there, too. Because you didn't spend the entire first date chronicling every single detail about yourself, one sleepy gray bullet point at a time.

Want to apply these shifts to your messaging and reach customers in Spokane Valley and Liberty Lake? Connect with us at www.peridot.info or contact me using the info below. Happy storytelling!

— **Josh Johnson, Chief Storyteller, Peridot Publishing**
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