

Three steps to more effective marketing

Practical marketing advice for ambitious owners of software, engineering and high-tech businesses.

The key to growth

Marketing success principles

Many software and technology businesses create great products, but they don't always grow to achieve their full potential.

There are many reasons for this but one of the most important factors in building a successful technology business is achieving the right marketing mindset.

There are three key things that successful business leaders do consistently well:

1. Their focus is on *solving problems for customers*
2. Their marketing messages *persuade on multiple levels*
3. They *target their resources on tightly defined markets*

In the following pages we will look at these three marketing success principles and how you can adapt your way of working to embrace them in your business.



Solving customers' most pressing problems

We all have a pretty good understanding of what our customers want from us. We wouldn't have much of a business otherwise.

But exceptional business leaders go much further than that. They build all their marketing from a clear understanding of the problems that they solve for their customers. They have worked out what prospective customers are struggling to achieve, what is holding them back and what is threatening their wellbeing.

If you want more powerful, persuasive marketing you need to gain that depth of insight, too.

Make time to have conversations with customers to understand the root causes of their individual and organisational needs.

No pain, no gain

The best salespeople will tell you, there is never a sale without pain. People often express an *interest* based on vision or aspiration, but it is only if they have a *real problem* to solve that they will be persuaded to go all the way and sign off any *significant investment*.

If you want to attract good sales prospects, you need marketing messages that *go beyond an attractive vision* and appeal to people who have a *deeply felt need* for what you are offering.

Practical steps

The first thing to do is understand why your existing customers bought from you. If you have a good working relationship, many people are open to this type of conversation:

1. *Make sure you understand the wider issues in your customers' businesses, not just what you do for them. Search for articles and discussions of hot topics.*
2. *Get in touch with a selection of good customers. Ask them about why they bought from you; what was going on at the time? How was it affecting them?*
3. *Review your marketing messages. Is the focus predominantly on the challenges that you solve for customers or the products and services that you sell?*

If you are used to being the expert in your field, it can feel disconcerting to acknowledge how much you don't yet know about your customers. But stick with it, as this depth of insight is gold dust.

Persuading on multiple levels

Almost every decision that people make is shaped by a mix of rational and emotional factors. Marketing for cars, phones and even banking lead with emotion very successfully.

It is a common mistake to assume that business purchases are based entirely on rational decision-making.

In fact, repeated research has shown that emotion plays a large part in business purchases. In large deals the emotional connection between buyer and vendor are actually *stronger* than in consumer purchases.

Make sure your marketing covers all the bases: Combine clear facts and figures with subtle emotional appeal, to attract customers and drive the sale forward.

Structuring a rational argument

At the heart of your marketing is the promise that you can solve your customer's problem or help them achieve their goals at a price that makes it worthwhile for them.

Structure your marketing messages to develop this clearly in your prospect's mind:

1. Start by clarifying the challenges you can solve for them; make it clear they have come to the right place.
2. Don't jump straight into answers; elaborate on the implications, reinforcing what is at stake if they do nothing.
3. Explain how the features of your products and services add up to a complete solution that delivers the benefits they need.

If you are to see off lower priced competitors and convince sceptical finance directors, you need to demonstrate how this purchase will reduce costs and increase margins. So do the groundwork now, working out the *financial case* for your products and services.

Invoking an emotional response

Individuals want more than just financial returns from a purchase. At a profound level they may seek to enhance their status or gain acceptance; they may be eager to try something new or anxious to minimise risk.

You see this in successful marketing, right back to 'nobody was ever fired for buying IBM'.

- Talk to customers, to understand how they felt and how they benefitted personally.
- Consider how the emotional drivers of people in the main market will differ from your early adopters.
- Make your case studies work harder by subtly illustrating how customers benefitted at an individual, emotional level.
- Use design to send out clear, subconscious signals about quality and prestige.

But keep it subtle and keep it real; people have an instinct for whether or not you are using emotion in a genuine, positive way.

Focusing your resources for success

Defining your target markets is one of the key decisions when you are planning for growth.

It's tempting to aim for the largest possible audience, so you can reach plenty of people. But strategically, when you are deciding where to allocate your time and resources, a tight focus almost always works better than a scattergun approach:

- With every other business clamouring to be heard, your only chance of standing out and holding customers' attention is with *consistent*, focused messages.
- Great marketing focuses on *specific* situations and challenges. It is only when you refer *directly* to what is frustrating people that they recognise and act on it.
- Customers can easily tell whether a business is *committed* to working with people like them. You cannot demonstrate your values if you have to water down your messages to suit too many different people.

Defining your niche

When you are deciding on your market focus, don't get too hung-up on other people's definitions of your market: industry sectors, professions, geographical locations, etc.

Be more creative around 'soft' variables, such as growth aspiration, attitude to risk and personal values. The most effective market segments are those which customers themselves identify with.

Here are some real examples:

- Business owners who have a deeply held commitment to improving their environmental impact and are ready to take action.
- Companies which use FileMaker software and are dissatisfied with the service from their current support provider.
- Company directors who recognise that their electromechanical products are becoming uncompetitive and do not have skills in-house to develop smart, connected systems.

Achieving balance

The risk with highly focused marketing is that you may choose a niche which is too small to support your targeted growth. To ensure you are targeting a viable market, it pays to do some *research and analysis* into market size, expected level of demand and the strength of your competitors.

When it comes to making a judgement about focusing or broadening out, remember that it's far *easier to build on success* in a relatively small niche, expanding into related or parallel markets, rather than trying to take them on all at once.



Final thoughts

Practical next steps

If you are committed to achieving profitable growth with your tech business and are ready for more persuasive, effective marketing communications, here are three practical activities to get you started:

1. Take a fresh look at your website, putting yourself in the shoes of a prospective customer.

Is it immediately clear to customers that your reason for being in business is to serve people like them?



2. Revisit the target markets defined in your business strategy.

Are they defined in terms of their specific needs? Do you need to rethink the different segments to include people who will respond to the same issues and be receptive to the same tone of voice?



3. Review your case studies and recent news or social media updates.

Is it clear to the reader how you are delivering value to clients at a financial, operational and personal level?



If you would like some help sharpening your market focus and developing more persuasive marketing messages, I'd be happy to share some initial ideas and advice. Start the conversation by emailing me, philip.jones@achaleon.com or calling 01905 317 318.

The Achaleon team

About the author

I help the directors of software, advanced engineering and hi-tech businesses to make their marketing more effective and persuasive, by drawing out and communicating what is most appealing and valuable to their target customers.

I am a chartered marketer and have worked in the tech sector for over 25 years, supporting innovative new startups, established businesses and companies preparing for trade sale.

I am the founder and Director of Achaleon.



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“ I believe that technology and innovation are the cornerstone of economic growth and sustainability.

My aim is to provide innovative tech companies with marketing that is every bit as impressive as the products or code that they create.

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If you would like to discuss how more persuasive marketing could help you achieve your growth ambitions, please get in touch:

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