



Add Personality and Stir

Finding and Using Personality Moments

*He entered the elevator. "Ground floor, please," he said.
He sounds nice, she thought, but he wouldn't notice me.
He noticed. He noticed her standing there, eyes straight ahead.
But he didn't blame her.
Nice perfume, he thought as they parted,
he lightly stroking his disfigured face,
she counting the steps to the waiting van.*

—Chris Macy, "Like Two Ships"

In the late 1980s a fellow named Steve Moss, who published a regional paper called the *New Times* in San Luis Obispo County, California, decided to launch a contest. A self-described lover of words, he called his annual writing challenge the Fifty-five Fiction Contest, because every story entered had to contain exactly 55 words. After nearly a decade of accepting submissions from writers and publishing a winner each year,

Moss published a collection of these winning stories in 1995 and called the compilation *The World's Shortest Stories*. In that year, I first read "Like Two Ships" and more than 10 years later the story has stuck in my head. What made this story so memorable? Is it the romance of two star-crossed lovers, one blind and the other disfigured, who would never meet? The fact that the story contained only 55 words? Actually, it was something far more basic.


The story was memorable because it captured and brought it to life a poignant, subtly dramatic moment that we can all recognize. Who can admit to never having had such a moment in an elevator with someone and thinking "What if?" Now consider this in relation to your business. There are similarly powerful moments that happen every day as you run your business, when you have a chance to build a deeper relationship with your customers, but often the moment passes unnoticed. It is the classic situation of forgetting about the little things while focusing instead on the continual quest for more sales and profits. If all your effort only amounts to selling something and cashing in on the sale, you have a problem. This chapter is about learning to spot the moments in between. Those hidden chances are your personality moments.

Understanding Personality Moments

A *personality moment* is a trigger. It is a point in time when you have the chance to build your relationship with your customer, or when you are in danger of losing it. There is a reason I am introducing the idea of personality moments in this chapter, just before we get to Part Two. So far, we have talked about all the elements that make up your company's personality. We've seen the range of people that can be spokespeople for your brand, and the importance of creating a strong backstory. These are all big things.

Personality moments are the opposite. They are the dozens of small occurrences that happen during an interaction between you and your customer, both before and after you make a sale or provide a service. The fact that these events are small doesn't make them insignificant; it only makes them easier to miss. This collection of small things is what builds the perception of your brand. The last stage of learning to inject more personality into your brand is understanding how to effectively spot and use your personality moments.

All of the examples of companies that I have shared thus far demonstrate the importance of doing this. Oil Can Henry's knows that letting its customers watch while mechanics work on their cars is a personality moment. SCOTTEVEST knows that the moment you get your multipocketed vest and start unzipping and looking in every pocket is a personality moment. Stacy Madison understood that her personality moment was when customers were waiting in line at her fledgling sandwich cart—and taking advantage of the moment actually led to the birth of her company.

 Personality moments are all around us and they represent pivotal moments in which you can build customer loyalty and stand apart from competitors. So let's talk about how you can get better at spotting them.

Desperately Seeking Attention

Another way to define a personality moment is as any moment when you have the attention of a customer or potential customer. This includes when they are researching products or about to purchase from you. It encompasses the time they spend unpacking your product when they get home, and the time they spend reading about it online before buying. You need to have the attention of a customer before you can do anything else.

Of course, attention is the prize that most companies are seeking from their customers or potential customers. In fact, attention is the prize everyone seems to be seeking, which has led to the common pronouncement that we are in an *attention economy*. The brands that dominate our lives and do the best are the ones that are able to capture attention the longest. It is no accident that when we talk about getting someone's attention, we usually talk of "capturing" it. Attention is seen as something to be chased. As we will see later in this chapter, this is exactly the view we need to get away from. Before we talk about that, however, let's take a closer look at how most organizations chase attention today.

The Three Methods of Getting Attention

Every idea you can think of for getting the attention of your customers will fall into one of three broad categories: *shock*, *sex*, or *relevance*. It may seem too simplistic to narrow it down to just these three things, but if you think about it every other method comes from these. Think of them as you do primary colors. Every way to get attention comes from some combination of these three elements. To say that shock and sex are popular ways of capturing attention today is probably a gross understatement. Everywhere you turn, sex is being used to promote just about everything from fashion and beauty products (just about 100 percent of them) to more surprising uses like the recent campaign from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) for vegetarianism, featuring print images of a naked Alicia Silverstone, and other stars.

The best examples of using sex to capture attention are those that manage to merge it with a message of relevance. One great example of this is the now-famous series of online videos developed by my colleagues at Ogilvy & Mather in Toronto for Dove skin-care products. The videos were part of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty and showed young girls being assailed by images of supermodel perfection. The ads still used sex,

but merged it with a message of relevance, which was (from a tagline used in the second video called “Onslaught”) to “speak to your daughter before the beauty industry does.”

When it comes to shock, one of the most riveting examples in recent memory is the series of safety-focused ads for Volkswagen developed by Crispin Porter & Bogusky, in which jarring images of people walking away from split-second accidents were used to show the safety of VW cars. Of course, shock is seldom used this perfectly. Few would argue with the fact that there is no shortage of shock or sex being used today in media or marketing.

In each of these examples of the successful use of sex and shock, the reason for their success is that the sex or shock is coupled with a relevant message. Relevance is the key factor that transforms something from good entertainment to good and entertaining marketing. In most cases, if you manage to entertain your audience but do not generate a benefit for your brand then you have essentially engaged in public service, not a marketing campaign. To a degree, this is what the annual advertising lovefest surrounding the Super Bowl has become—a chance for brands to entertain consumers with questionable linkages back to their brands.

There are thousands of examples of marketing efforts that fit this category. The brands using them manage to capture attention for a moment, but lose it quickly after that. Of the three methods for capturing attention, relevance is clearly the unifying factor that makes a message more than something that simply captures attention for a moment and squanders it after that.

Relevance Is the Key

A perfect illustration of the power of relevance is online keyword marketing. Every artfully written haiku-style text ad for Google is aimed at the same goal—to get someone to click a link. That click is generated through

relevance. It is also how effectiveness is typically measured. Click through rates (CTR) are the industry standard for performance of an online campaign. Once a user has clicked that link, he or she comes to a superoptimized “landing page,” which should be tailor-made for what we believe they were interested in, and from then on the experience is focused on conversion. This is a typical model for what most businesses would likely consider good marketing. Relevance is usually expected to lead to conversion.

The struggle to be relevant, though, is tricky business. Reaching the right person at the right time with the right message is notoriously difficult. If it were easy, you would never need to read a book about how to do it. What is often forgotten is that there *is* one way to get your customers’ attention through relevance that doesn’t require you to “capture” it. Before you start using personality moments effectively, you need to know what this method is and the paradox that leads to it.

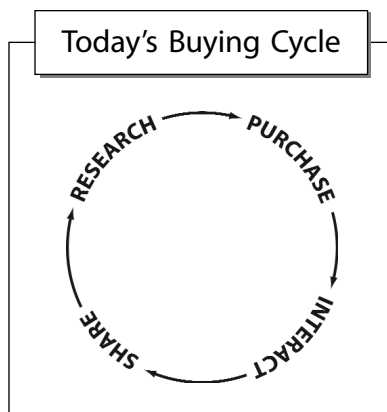
The Attention Paradox

Herbert Simon, the late Nobel laureate economist famously said, “A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.”¹ When it comes to most marketing messages, this is certainly true. An interesting result of our constantly dealing with this wealth of information is that we are all getting better at filtering out information that we don’t care about. *The point is not that we have less attention to give, but that we are far more selective with how we spend it.*

Now let’s look at this selective attention and apply it to something most businesses will be familiar with: the buying cycle. This is a cycle of activities that typically happens between the moment when consumers are deciding what to buy and the point when they use it and start the process

¹ H. A. Simon, “Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World,” in Martin Greenberger, *Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest*, 1971, pp. 40–41.

over again. With slight variations, it is usually a very similar diagram. Here's my view of what the buying cycle today looks like:



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Before I go into detail about each phase, I should note that if you think about our “poverty of attention,” it is largely based on looking at the first stage of this cycle: research. This is the stage where the majority of marketing dollars are spent. Brands try to buy ads in places where consumers are likely to look as they seek a particular product or service. Keyword ads on Google are targeted to keywords in searches that people use to research. Public relations efforts focus on media that a target audience is assumed to consume. Whether you realize it or not, the bulk of your time, effort, and budget in marketing is being spent on just one phase of the buying cycle: the first one.

Kill the Silos

You can probably already see where this is going. If the latter three phases of the buying cycle are left largely untouched by marketing dollars, then the natural questions to focus on are why this is and what to do about it. The obvious reason most marketing focuses on just the research stage is that

the other phases are handed off to other departments or seen as the responsibility of different teams within an organization (fulfillment, customer service, tech support, etc.). If you have ever worked in an organization with departments like this, you will understand what I mean when I say “kill the silos,” meaning, break down the barriers between departments and roles.

When your customer gets to the next stage of purchasing your product or service, she has already made a decision to interact with you and is either in the act of buying it or waiting to buy it. This is followed by the moment when she gets a product or service, opens it, and first uses it. Often concurrently, she is also sharing this experience with others or providing feedback to you.

This is the paradox of attention—that the moment when you have your customer’s nearly undivided attention is the same moment when the relationship with the customer moves from marketing to other areas of the business. None of these three moments after research suffers from a paucity² of attention. Yet it is often wasted. The real question you need to answer is: how can you start to better focus on those moments where you *already have your customer’s attention* and use those to demonstrate your personality?

Forget the Thrill of the Chase

To do this, you first need to forget the thrill of the chase. This is a chase most of us know well, in which consumers are hapless “targets”—and we use every militaristic term we can muster (guerrilla, campaign, target, capture, etc.) to describe the ways in which we try to hunt them down. Yet for all the time organizations spend on this chase, it is almost always a difficult task, because it requires us to find ever-new ways to capture consumers’ attention. What if your local pizza delivery chains didn’t have to come up with

²I know I talked about simplicity in writing in Chapter 4, but this is too cool of a word to pass up. I dare you to say it out loud and not be just a little impressed with yourself.

one more new way to stuff double the cheese into some new orifice of a pizza crust in order to “reinvent” pizza? The world would be a simpler place.

In fact, home pizza delivery offers a great example of the dangers of this chase. In recent years the product has been overdramatized by new “innovations” that seem to emerge every few months. These pizza makers are all competing in the research phase of your buying cycle, when you are making your choice about which one to call. What about the moment when the pizza is delivered to you, or when you are eating it, or when you are ordering your next one? These are the forgotten moments in the pizza delivery process, and the ones that are ripe for using personality.

As we will see in the rest of this chapter, the secret to being able to use personality moments effectively is having a good eye for spotting when you have captured your customer’s attention and have a chance to do more with it. Your goal should be to more efficiently turn every such situation into a personality moment. The brands that do this successfully are the ones that develop personality.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, you will read examples of brands that are successfully using their personality moments across more than one phase of the buying cycle. We will also look at some case studies of brands that have managed to find and use their personality moments to great effect. In many cases, these brands are focusing on the moments when they have their customer’s attention. A few also find a way to stand out from competitors at the point of research and even before purchase or before their brand or products are ever considered. In either case, the ideal method for learning how to recognize personality moments is to study how some of these brands do it—starting with an unlikely choice, one that doesn’t really offer a product or a service. The example is a southern rock and roll band that has built a passionate following of fans who they affectionately call the Hazelnuts.