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## MID-IOWA BUSINESS

# Creating the right message for your audience is key to success

**A**ugust marks the three-year anniversary of my consulting business. As such, it seems an appropriate time to reflect on a valuable lesson learned.

Like probably all entrepreneurs, I started my new venture with high confidence in my product or service. In my case, over 25 years of experience with an organization generally considered the best in the world in its industry had exposed me to innumerable best practices, tools and leadership principles. Certainly the world of small- to mid-sized businesses and organizations, whose leaders hadn't had the benefits of being raised in a world-class environment, would beat a path to my door, right?

Not quite.

First, there was the rather important detail of marketing my fledgling venture.

Let's start with a couple of definitions. Marketing is the process of identifying potential customer profiles, then determining how to create awareness and persuade those various profiles to consider your product or



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via marketing.

Perhaps a useful analogy is an oil company. Marketing is the all-important prospecting or exploration process to locate precious reserves. Sales is concerned with the tactics that will be used to actually harvest the oil from the reserve.

Unfortunately, too often new business owners jump immediately to sales tactics. This is akin to drilling for oil in my backyard.

First, it makes sense to define your target. What differentiates you from the competition? What's your niche? In his classic book "Good to Great," author Jim Collins refers to this as the hedgehog concept — what one thing can your organization be the best in the world at?

service.

Sales, on the other hand, involves the series of steps to be taken to close the deal once an interest is created

The more precisely a niche can be defined, the greater the chances of successfully capturing it. In the case of my business, I've decided to focus on providing hands-on guidance on implementing Lean methods for small- to mid-sized manufacturing and administrative organizations within central Iowa. The target audience is therefore the senior executives within those organizations.

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to tightly define one's niche. Why limit potential customers? But in a world where even M&Ms are custom manufactured to celebrate a bar mitzvah, customers expect a near-perfect fit.

Once the target is identified, the next consideration is the message. When the potential customer thinks of our organization, what do we want them to think? Product uniqueness? Speed? Service? Price?

Again, this requires an ability to focus. Attempting to be all things to everyone will result in satisfying few and exciting no one. Your message obviously must be strongly aligned with

your overall business strategy — how will you compete?

In the case of Brimeyer LLC, the message is "always helpful." While every interaction with potential clients, and even existing clients, isn't necessarily a profitable one for my business, I strive to create a "that was time well spent" experience for them. If I consistently do that, profitability will take care of itself.

Only after the target audience and message have been developed is it time to think about which awareness tactics will be used:

- What does your target audience read? Watch? Listen to?
- Where do they hang out?
- How is your message most convincingly conveyed?

Based on the above analysis, mass media advertising isn't a good fit for my business. The majority of people in my target audience don't have Twitter accounts, and they certainly don't want to be bothered by frequent or mass-marketed touches. Thus, the following tactics are used to convey my message to the target market:

- Carefully chosen speaking

opportunities at the right seminars (i.e., those attended by key decision-makers).

- Selective networking.
- Occasional targeted emails with specific helpful information.
- My Ames Tribune Business Monthly column.
- A carefully designed website containing an archive of monthly columns.

Finally, and most importantly, don't overlook the proven fact that the easiest customers to attract are existing customers. Fully and consistently living your message with current customers keeps them coming back and may even prompt them to spread positive word-of-mouth advertising about your business. And that's more powerful than anything you can plan or buy.

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