

25 Marketing Tactics

*Prepared for MLS: Marketing Library Services
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Marketing is the battle cry in virtually every business sector today. Most information professionals have not studied the science of marketing as part of our academic or on-the-job training. There are many complex definitions of marketing, but I prefer a plainer, simpler approach.

Marketing, from my viewpoint, has three elements. It (1) explains-how a product can help another person solve a problem, (2) gives the person the information necessary to make a purchase decision, and (3) satisfies a significant need.

Before outlining 25 proven marketing tactics, many of which you can implement immediately, let me explain the philosophical foundation on which the marketing of information services under these ideas. These are **GEMs** in that this acronym stands for Guidelines for Educational Marketing. The key word is Educational because the purpose of marketing elusive information services is equipping the buyer or customer to know what he or she is getting.

Nine Marketing Gems

1. Tell the Truth.

A great temptation exists to shape facts to make selling easier. In the information business, the absence of standards and an information-industry **Consumer's Report** has encouraged the creation of cut-rate information products. In 1984 and 1986, I described this approach to electronic information product development as the **Seventh Avenue Strategy**. As we all know, the knock-off product drives the fashion business. More and more information professionals are taking this path as well.

A number of information producers sell a product with a hefty journal list. When one compares the list with what is in the database, reality is different from the description.

GEM 1 requires that an information marketer present facts objectively about:

- Consistency of the data
- Other ways to get the same data

- Editorial or professional standards used to develop the data
- Copyright and ownership of the data
- Data accuracy
- Costs of other ways to get equivalent data
- Human- and machine-dependent performance features affecting the data.

The essence of truthfulness is your ability to compare your information products and **services factually** with similar or competitive products. Avoid describing a product with a metaphor. When I hear a marketing presentation which says, "Our database is just like Database **X**," the marketer does not know whether the customer will think more or less of his product. In short, the marketer loses control of the prospect's thoughts.

It is equally dangerous to compare a new or unknown service with the service of a large, established company. The credibility of the marketer is at stake. How can an information broker, for example, expect a client to believe that the service provided by a small **firm** to be equivalent to that offered by a nationally-known organization.

Marketing experts rarely take liberties with the truth. They don't have to cut corners. They value their credibility. In short, GEM 1 means, "Keep your credibility." Without it, you will fail in the long run.

2. Build Relationships.

Build relationships with your prospects and customers. It is a often-overlooked information-marketing fact that the number of people who buy information products and services is very small in comparison with the number of people who sell information products. Equally important and ignored by most information marketers is that selling information--regardless of form--has more in common with selling a service than selling a tangible product.

A successful marketing program always pivots on individuals who make a purchasing decision. The 'relationship approach means that you work on a one-on-one basis and **view** the purpose of the marketing exercise as an opportunity to build trust. You can't advertise personal service. Provide personal service, then it's not necessary to talk about it.

Examples of effective customer service include Dialog's small group training sessions, **IAC's** and Mead Data's direct visits to customers, and Predicast's 800 telephone service.

Bad customer service includes a clumsy telephone interface to a help desk, a company which has different representatives calling on the same prospect without coordinating visits, or a self-serving newsletters filled with puffery.

3. Set and Meet High Standards.

Deliver a product or service that meets your personal standards of excellence. Be proud of the work you're doing.

There is a corporate side to meeting standards of excellence as well. The company must value excellence and institutionalize procedures which help the individuals do their best job.

But in my experience, individuals govern the quality of the information product, and they energize organizations to make the excellence a routine part of what the company does. The corporate culture, therefore, is shared by the individual

employees and the organization. Steve Goldspiel personally and institutionally makes **Disclosure** the outstanding product it is. Similarly, Andrea Broadbent and Julia Denny drive the quality of the McGraw-Hill electronic products. Andy Mills and **Steve Keeble** at Technical Publishing of **InvesText** create **an** environment in which excellence can flourish.

4. Meet a Real Need.

Many highly-acclaimed expert marketers sell because they have an uncanny ability to **find** needs which have not been met, or they can create needs and then sell products which satisfy them. Is this relationship marketing or **cleverness**? How many times do you go **to** a company one time for a product and service and never go back? Do you want your marketing to pull repeat business or do you want to resort to tricks to build business?

Information marketers, in my opinion, are on more solid footing if they try to meet a need which exists but is not fully satisfied. Inventing needs degenerates into hucksterism.

Meeting a need is little more than solving a problem for someone. Without making need satisfaction overly complex, keep in mind that the problem can be solved with a product or **service** which provides esteem, power, or pleasure.

Examples of information products and services which meet needs squarely are Bowker's **Books in Print Plus**, the newsletter **MLS: Marketing Library Services**, and the Corporate Intelligence Seminar series offered by Dun & Bradstreet, Predicasts, and Data Courier. Let's look at each briefly:

- **Books in Print Plus** provides a CD-ROM version of Bowker's **Books in Print** with important and 'useful differences. One can locate a title and then using the capabilities of the product order the book electronically. Libraries and book stores find the product reduces paperwork and staff time.
- **MLS: Marketing Library Services** is a newsletter edited by Sharon **LaRosa** in Boston. It provides case studies of libraries which have successfully marketed **their** services. According to **LaRosa**, no other publication addressed libraries' need for practical marketing information. As a result, the newsletter has become a success.
- The Corporate Intelligence Seminars are offered to end users and librarians by three competitors--Dun & Bradstreet, Predicasts, and Data Courier. The seminar has two parts: A content-oriented review of the products offered by the three business database producers in the morning and a how-to session offered in the afternoon with the emphasis on searching techniques used to retrieve the information. The seminars meet the need of online searchers for comparative looks at business databases and practical how-to search information.

None of these products is a me-too, a hand-me-down idea, or a knock-off of another's idea. Each company has identified a need and developed a product to satisfy that need. Integrity characterizes the effective satisfaction of an information need.

5. Focus on a Target.

Find a niche and **fill** a need in it. A **niche** in marketing jargon is group of prospects with some unifying characteristic and a common problem. Examples of excellent **niche** marketing are the **E. B. Stevens Co.**'s magazine subscription services for library acquisition departments. As most of you know, **EBSCO** reduces paperwork and centralizes the subscription process. To cite another example: Dow Jones News/Retrieval provides business people with access to stock data, gaining on

CompuServe and staying well in front of Delphi, The Source, **GENIE**, and other **similar** services. Dow Jones is positioned to dominate this niche because they have **skillfully** packaged a number of business services of interest to marketing, administrative, and management people. They have captured significant market share in this niche.

In my experience, the more precisely you can define the niche and the need for **your** product, the greater your chance of success. Laser Disclosure provides **financial** services firms with a complete Securities & Exchange Commission library, continuously updated on **CD-ROM**. The market is well-defined and has continuous need for timely access to various SEC documents. Contrast this with the **CD-ROM** versions of **ERIC**. None has made significant market headway because the library market does not need **ERIC** in its present **CD-ROM** formats.

I learned the hard way that it is easier to **find** an empty niche and create a product which meets a specific need than it is to try and create a product which is ail things to ail people. If you know your market niche:

- You can target your promotional activities to a specifically defined group of prospects
- Marketing dollars can be used to repeat a message to a small group instead of spending larger amounts to reach more people one time.
- You can focus your message.

6. Seek Friends.

Position your product to win friends, not make enemies. In the information business, it is rare that a single source can answer a complex question adequately.

Information professionals recognize the complementary nature of information products. Established information companies also realize the supporting roles products play. It is rarely a wise idea to attack a competitor in his market niche head on. The established competitor can cut prices or offer a package of services the newcomer cannot match.

A wise course of action is to establish a complementary relationship among information marketers, their products and services. Then, when it is necessary to compete, everyone helps the customer to make an informed judgment about which product's features and **benefits** are right for meeting his needs. Positioning, **therefore**, means:

- Complement existing products and services
- Fill a specific, empty niche with a product or service which meets a real need
- Minimize the head-to-head competition and emphasize the mutually supportive nature of products and services.

You sell more when your competitors are avoiding you than when they are actively selling against you.

7. Remain Steady.

Be consistent. I am interested in what marketers call **repositioning**. This concept means that the marketing of the product is reshaped in order to attract more sales.

Consider for a moment the directory and database of software marketed as **MENU**. Originally the database was to drive software sales. The product was made part of a large European publisher and then marketed as a database of software with emphasis placed upon the operating versions of each software package. Now **MENU** is

a **specialized** directories, more a magazine than a database. With each modification in the way the product is explained to the customers, repositioning is occurred.

In my experience, consistency in product positioning is critical. Repositioning can be successful only if handled with care. The more frequently a product is repositioned, the message communicated is that the people making the product don't have their act together. The different messages sent to the market are confusing.

Contrast **MENU's** marketing with the approach taken by Information Sources Inc. of Berkeley, California. The original product was a business software print directory. The product went online in the **mid-80s** and has undergone thoughtful **evolution**. It now offers customized print listings and will include reviews of business software products in **mid-1989**. The marketing of the product and its positioning have been consistent. Since the product's inception, its credibility and revenues have risen steadily.

Chart a course and stick with it. Gradual evolution is preferable to product revolution. Repositioning often foreshadows failure.

8. Persevere.

Stand behind the product. Most of us have had problems with automobile warranties or know of someone who has. The story is the same. A car develops a problem and the dealer can't or won't **fix** the car. Tempers flare and the once-proud owner says, "I'll never buy an **XYZ** again."

In the information industry, according to Carlos Cuadra, publisher of the **Cuadra/Elsevier Directory of Online Databases**, the speed of new database development has slowed and the rate of database failure has risen. Fewer and fewer companies are willing to make a long-term commitment to this type of information product.

The fact of the matter is that it takes time for an information product to take hold in the marketplace. Only a very few products can be an instant success like **Invest-Text**, which contains the full text of reports from investment firms, or Business Dateline, selected articles from America's and Canada's regional business publications. Most information products require a lengthy incubation time. H.W. Wilson, West Publishing, the New York Times Co., McGraw-Hill, and others have been working for years to build their information credibility and product portfolios.

These companies offer an implicit money-back guarantee. They want customers to be pleased with the information they offer and stand behind what they do. They are in business for the long-haul and do not chase the quick buck. Mead Data, for example, has been committed to full-text business information for more than a decade, and that commitment says something about the company's persistence.

If you introduce a product and quit, I have found that it becomes more difficult to get support for the next product. It is almost better to create a product, work at it, and fail than to pull the plug. In our world, precipitous actions make people nervous, uncertain, and uncomfortable because you could pull the plug on them.

Be prepared to stand behind your product by providing fast, quality service. At all costs, make the customer feel good about the product, company, and you.

9. Educate.

The formula for success is **E-F-A-B**. Marketers trained at business schools in the U.S. and England learn to sell by following the formula **F-A-B** or **Features-Advantages-Benefits**. First the marketer explains the features of the product; that is, what it does. Next he spells out the technical advantages of the particular product, typically by showing competing products as lacking these advantages. Last he tells

the customer how the product or service benefits him; for example, saves time or money, appeals to fear, or improves the life of the prospect.

The problem with this formula is that it works only with products which the customer understands. It assumes a solid foundation of knowledge, experience, and needs. If I go to buy a big-screen TV, the salesman tells me what the TV's features are; for example, remote control, stereo sound, and black-matrix picture tube. He then gives me the advantages of these features, contrasting them with another model more or less expensive than the one I'm looking at. Good marketers watch for non-verbal clues about the price I'm willing to pay or ask, "How much do you want to spend?" Finally, he gives me the benefits. Last week, the benefits I was offered included no payments until January 1990, free delivery, more enjoyment for my family, and better audio.

What happens, though, when the product and the service are not well known or understood by the prospect? In my experience, information products and services are hard to understand and difficult to explain. Even well-informed information professionals are unable to keep at their fingertips the nuances of well-known, established information products. They are not able to have a wide and deep experience base for new **electronic** media, new or improved databases, and new print information products.

The more advanced the technology, the more complex the marketing job. Further complicating marketing is the Marshall **McLuhan's** observation that the "medium is the message." The print version of Dun's *Million Dollar Directory* is a different product from the online version in File 517.

To market an **information** product requires an additional and crucial step preceding **F-A-D**. The first step is **E**, education. The information marketer must explain:

- What the information is (a factual description)
- What **the** information can do (applications-based examples)
- What the technology is (factual description and comparison and contrast with the information technology familiar to the prospect)
- How the information and technology interact (allay fears and concerns about **complexity**, obsolescence, ease-of-use, and maintenance).

Once this foundation is put in place, then **F-A-B** approach makes sense.

It is one of my recurring nightmares that I market a new information product and do not follow **E-F-A-B**. The **result** is that I go to conference after conference and have to explain again and again what the product is and how it works. It is a modern version of the myth of Sisyphus. You push the rock to the top of the hill by explaining the product only to have it roll back down when the prospect says, "I don't know what you're selling." Short cuts lead to confusion.

Remember: the prospect always gets educated. It is better for you to do that job because then you have some influence over the foundation on which a purchase decision is made. If you let someone else do the teaching, you will have a more difficult time making the sale because you won't have any first-hand knowledge of what the prospect knows.

25 Tactics

Here's the list of 25 marketing tactics. Pick and choose the tactics you need to help you market your products.

To **use this list**, select the **tactics** and then implement them using the nine **GEMs** outlined above. There is no one way to market. You must innovate and modify.

- Develop a strategic information plan. Know where you are going, what your budget is, and how you will measure success. A successful marketing program is not a random walk; it is a purposeful journey.
- Create a newsletter for your customers. There are too many newsletters today. Keep yours short, easy-to-read, and on schedule. This establishes routine communication to your prospects and customers.

1 Develop a presentation using slides or flip charts that follow the **E-F-A-B** format. This is the basic selling tool.

2 Write articles for professional publications, reprint them, and use them as a direct mail pieces. This is a third-party endorsement of you.

3 Offer one-on-one training about your product to senior managers or influence leaders. This provides education and builds relationships.

4 Hold small-group training for departments. This establishes a dialogue with potential customers.

5 Invite other information professionals to give presentations on complementary products. This establishes your credibility and demonstrates confidence.

6 Assemble a portfolio of case studies describing the benefits of your product. This is third-party endorsement and applications selling.

7 Prepare a letter-sized brochure summarizing your product. Keep it simple and on one page. The more like a technical specification the more credibility the brochure has. Expensive printing and elaborate design can communicate a lack of judgment in how to spend money.

8 Publish a compilation of information on a hot topic. This shows how your product looks and makes it tangible.

9 Publish an annual information report. This documents your track record.

10 Communicate consistently in a variety of media; for example, bulletin boards, news releases, and memoranda. This provides a routine information flow about your product.

11 Obtain new **signage** or a new logo. This calls attention to a new or improved product. It signals a more aggressive marketing posture.

12 Make sales calls on prospects and ask them what they need. This builds your information base, **defines** niches, and suggests new products.

13 Publish a list of new materials available. This is news and communicates positive change.

14 Offer to assist selected departments with specific projects. This builds a track record within a niche.

15 Use the inter-office mail to inform individuals of developments important to them. This maintains communication and reinforces relationships.

16 Hold an annual open house. This creates traffic and provides an opportunity to talk one-on-one.

17 Establish a telephone hotline. This is the evidence that you are there to help your customers.

18 Build bridges to the corporate computer center. This gives credence to the complementary nature of your products.

19 Acquire text-retrieval and database software and offer to assist groups wanting to build databases. This positions you as an expert.

20 Keep track of library usage, queries, and revenue. This builds evidence which can be used to demonstrate value.

21 Attend trade shows and circulate trip reports. This shows your ability to bring valuable information to prospects.

22 Get as much knowledge about systems, technology, and competitive products as you can. This enables you to be spontaneously helpful.

23 Start an online timesharing service using bulletin board software (**BBS**) like Galaticom available on your city's **BBS**. You can provide a wide range of information and services to create awareness.

24 Organize an annual information services conference in your city. Involve such outside speakers as local software developers, computer dealers, and university professors. Publicize the seminar using other tips in this list.

25 Work with your local Chamber of Commerce to start an information special interest group. Meetings can be held every month or two and feature outside **speakers** who address various information topics. Publicize the programs using the Chamber's mailing list and newsletter.

Next Steps

For you to take the next step in marketing, I have several suggestions. First, enroll in marketing courses at a university in your area. The courses will reward you in many ways. Chief among them are the class discussions and the opportunity to absorb case studies of marketing successes and failures. Second, become familiar with the articles and books cited in this paper's bibliography. And, try your hand at marketing on small or large scales. If you follow the **GEMS**, you will be able to refine your efforts and help ensure yourself of success.