

Perfecting Your 30-second Commercial

Six Secrets to Tooting Your Own Horn

By *SUSAN BELLOWS*

Let's face it. Unless we are professional sales people, most of us just don't like to sell. This is especially true when it comes to selling ourselves. But marketing ourselves — our skills, talents, and products/services — is crucial to the development of our business.

So, what do you say when someone asks "what do you do for a living?" Do you shoot from the hip and say whatever comes to mind at that moment? Rather than hemming and hawing, or going into tedious details from the time you start speaking, you need to think like an advertising executive and come prepared with a 30-second commercial for yourself. A well-crafted commercial is a powerful tool that allows you to market yourself quickly, easily, painlessly and effectively.

Before you can start crafting a commercial, you need to have a clear understanding of what makes you, your product, or your service unique. You also need to know what motivates your customers and prospects — what 'pain' does your product or service alleviate? Shoplifters may be an example of pain for a retail store owner, insomnia for a stressed executive, and employee turnover for a production line manager. Remember, most people don't like to spend money, but they do want to solve their problems. So, give them a reason to buy by reminding them how and why your product or your service can alleviate their pain.

With a firm understanding of what makes your business unique and what pain you take away, you are ready to follow six proven secrets for developing and perfecting your 30 Second Commercial.

Secret 1: Paint a memorable picture with words, visuals, or demonstrations to create "top of

the mind" awareness.

If you see a black, cone-shaped hat, what do you think of? That is top of the mind awareness. Your commercial needs to remind your audience of you — not a product or service that others offer — but you, specifically, and what you can do for them.

Most people are visual learners. They remember what they see. But most of the time you'll run into someone in the elevator, or at a networking event or another place where a visual display will be impossible. This is why your commercial needs to 'paint a picture' with words — something that people will be able to visualize and remember. A good technique in developing a memorable word picture is to draw a blank television or computer screen. Then imagine that everyone you talk to is that blank screen, and it's your job to fill it in.

Memorable word pictures for 30 Second Commercials include the following items:

- Your name and title
- The solution (service) you provide
- An example
- A credibility statement
- A stamp of approval

Secret 2: Include your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) so that you can answer the unspoken questions 'What's in it for me' and 'So what?'

People are inherently self-centered and self-absorbed. We want to know, on some level, 'What's in it for me?' Even the most charitable act generally has a 'What's in it for me?' component. With all the information that we take in on a daily basis, we're constantly scanning conversation, waiting to hear something that might be of help or interest to us.

Commercials are a perfect example of this. How many times have you been only half-watching

TV, when suddenly you perk up at the mention of something that you're interested in? The same concept holds true for 30-second commercials. You might hear someone say they are a time management consultant, but you probably think 'So what?' until you hear the answer to the questions 'What's in it for me?'

Your unique selling proposition is what gets you past the 'So what?' of prospective clients.

Secret 3: Incorporate customer language ('verbatim') in your commercial.

You should have different 30-second commercials for different audiences because your commercial will be more effective if it is targeted to a specific audience. You'll want to 'talk the talk' of that audience.

The easiest way to build your dictionary of customer language is to take special care to notice customer-specific words and phrases when you talk to clients or prospects. Take notes if possible. Your customers will tell you what's important to them in their own language, and you can begin incorporating that language into your 30-second commercials.

A good way to get started on this is to call your existing clients and ask them what benefit they get out of your services. Now you have language from actual customers that you can start using, and you'll start to see themes in what they say. However, avoid using jargon and acronyms since they often alienate more people than they impress.

Secret 4: Practice, vary and test your commercial.

There is no way to stress this enough: practice, vary, and test your 30-second Commercial.

Practice out loud, incorporating purposeful pauses. You don't

want to sound as if you've memorized a string of words and are reciting them. You want your commercial to sound conversational, as if you are talking off the top of your head. The best way to accomplish this is to practice, practice, practice. You want the words to flow.

Vary your commercial so that you have appropriate commercials for different audiences. First develop your general commercial. Once you have a solid description of what you do, you can develop key messages for each audience, incorporating the appropriate customer language in each commercial.

Test your commercial on anyone who'll sit still long enough for you say it. This means your spouse, your child, your sibling, your friends and colleagues.

Secret 5: Ask prospects what their major challenges are before answering what you do. Let them see that you care about them.

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Psychologists tell us that there are five major reasons people buy: pain/problem, fear, present pleasure, future pleasure, and interest. The most common reason people buy is pain — something is wrong in their businesses or personal lives that they want fixed and they are prepared to pay to fix it.

The best sales professionals never sell anything. They offer solutions. They uncover pain and make it go away. People make decisions intellectually, but buy emotionally. For example, the \$33 billion diet industry thrives because women buy weight-loss programs on the emotional belief that they need to be a different dress size.

So how do we find pain? We

learn to ask gentle, probing questions. Instead of asking, "How can I help you?" you could ask a more concrete question, such as "If you could wave a magic wand, what would _____ be like?" Allowing them to describe their ideal situation helps you identify pain, problems and possible remedies and opportunities.

Once you have built rapport with the prospect, try asking carefully worded, sensitively posed questions to help get to your prospect's pain. Prospects will not just tell you their real problems up front; they'll give you an intellec-

tual 'smoke screen.' For example, a customer in a store, when approached by a sales associate, may deflect sales pressure with a casual, 'No thanks, I'm just browsing.' This is a common smoke screen – one we all have instinctively used even though few of us have time to browse causally through stores — usually we have made a conscious decision to visit that store in search of a particular item.

Even though discussing pain and problems may be uncomfortable, asking probing questions can help you uncover your

prospect's pain and helps them come to the conclusion that you can help. When you find people who have pain, can pay to get rid of pain and who can make the buying decision, then be sure of the following:

The problem is one that you can fix.

Your prospect acknowledges his/her problem.

Your prospect is willing to do something to fix the problem.

Your prospect is committed to fixing the problem.

Remember, people buy for *their* reasons, not yours. When

you become skillful at asking questions and uncovering pain, you'll see business skyrocket.

Secret 6: Listen 70% of the time.

By listening you will know your prospect's pain and be able to introduce yourself through your targeted 30-Second Commercial as the person who can end the pain.❖

Susan Bellows is a marketing and time management consultant and a sales trainer and coach; sbellows@susanbellows.com.