

Marketing Basics

For Your Osteopathic Practice



By Chris Dann

CONTENTS

Page 2

**Caveat Venditor
or 'Marketing is for the Good Guys'**

Page 4

USPs

Page 5

To Specialise or not to Specialise

Page 8

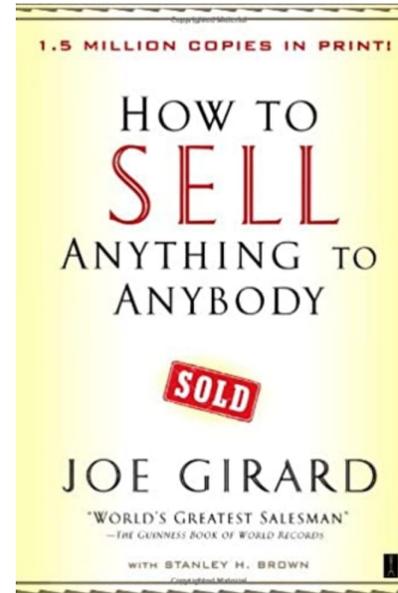
The Attention Bucket and the Big Idea

Page 10

Experiment, Learn, Enjoy

Caveat Venditor or ‘Marketing is for the Good Guys’

In his 1977 book “How to Sell Anything to Anybody”, Joe Girard, the ‘greatest salesman of all time’, outlines his methodology for selling, basically by lying to potential customers. If you see golf clubs in their car then tell them you play golf. If they say they went on holiday somewhere, you tell them you went there too. His entire system was based on duping the customer into parting with their cash, and it worked. I was trained as a salesman in much the same way.



In the modern world of global connectivity, lies won't get you very far. We can read reviews from other customers, we can potentially see the salesperson's social media or blog and we can review their claims. We can research their product and them before deciding whether to purchase. Customers expect sellers to share their values and to approach them with honesty and integrity.

As a result, marketing has seen a sea change over the last 30 or so years. Ramming marketing messages down customers' throats to make a quick buck simply will not work. We now talk about things like 'consent marketing' and 'tribe building'. We have to find communities we can help and offer them that help, then live up to our word and build a reputation.

This change is a good thing. It makes the world a better place, and makes marketing a far more rewarding endeavour. We are hiding nothing from the customer. We aim to approach them honestly about our services, be of genuine help and use, and encourage them to talk about us to build up a genuine reputation built on trust.

Marketing, then, has become an endeavour of honesty and transparency, of finding our place within a community and offering it something of genuine value. Remember this always when

thinking about your marketing. The aim is not to ‘persuade people to use our services’ but to codify exactly what we offer, then put our offers in front of the people whose lives we can make the most positive difference to, in a way that makes the offer as attractive as possible, enabling them to take the positive step forward in improving their lives.

Phew. Now we’ve established that we’re the good guys and girls, let’s start honing our skills. In this first guide we’re going to look at a few basic principles that we’ll come back to as we go through the other guides and which will form the basis of your marketing, starting with your **USPs**.

USPs

Nearly every marketing project starts by looking at our Unique Selling Points. If you like these are our starter selling points which we will build on later. Unique selling points (or propositions) are ideally the things that make our business unique. As osteopaths it's a little more difficult to be 'unique', but just start by brainstorming your selling points and the reasons why someone might choose you. Write down anything that comes to mind, as what seems like a stupid idea might be a silver bullet later on.

Let's say Beth is an osteopath, her initial list of selling points might look like this:

- Qualified osteopath
- 5 years experience
- Comfortable treatment room
- Skilled with various treatments
- Friendly and personable
- Good at explaining treatments to patients
- Evening and weekend slots available

Easy, right? Let's move on to something a bit more tricky: **To Specialise or not to Specialise**

To Specialise or not to Specialise

“When you market to everyone, you’re marketing to no-one.”

Seth Godin

The next step in marketing would normally be called something like “finding your market space”, basically differentiating yourself from your competitors as much as possible. We would draw a price/quality graph, plot our competitors and show that if there are only expensive, high-quality restaurants in my town then it makes sense to open a cheap diner, and vice versa.

Osteopathy is a special case. No-one goes to a “budget osteopath”, and some homogeneity in that every qualified osteopath has the same basic skillset and knowledge is essential for the profession to have any meaning at all. We can, however, decide to specialise. Let’s say I know that there are equal markets in my town for RSI, back pain and sports injuries. There is already an RSI specialist and a back pain specialist. It makes sense for me to set myself up as the sports injury specialist, and have that whole part of the market to myself.

But hang on, you might think, why not market to all three? Because when given the choice, we will pretty much always choose the narrowest company niche which suits us. We will go with the specialist rather than the more generic option, even if we know that difference is more perceived than real. Of course, the problem for the marketer is that by specialising, and ensuring we get more of the business from that particular niche, we are cutting off all the other potential sources of business that we might get if we marketed more generically. But when we market more generically, our messages lose their specific appeal and we will have to work harder for a sale.

What a conundrum. The right place for you to specialise and how much, if at all, is something to figure out based on your market, interests and expertise. If there is already a ‘sports injury clinic’ in my town it makes sense for me to set myself up as something else, but if sports injuries is what you really want to do, don’t do something you’re not interested in just because there’s a gap in the market.

You can hedge your bets by mixing a general marketing approach with a more specialised. My own osteopath is an 'osteopathic and sports injury clinic', targeting his preferred niche without cutting off other business. And of course, if something isn't working for you, you can always change it.

Other Reasons to Specialise

Another reason to target a specific market is that not everyone knows what an osteopath is or what they do. If you market yourself as a solicitor or accountant, everyone generally knows what they do and when they need one, whereas with osteopaths people often only know that they have an injury. I spent years suffering from back pain before someone suggested I tried an osteopath, I had absolutely no idea what they did. By marketing as a 'back pain specialist', 'sports injury specialist', or whatever else, you are speaking the language of your potential patient and will pick up business from people who might not already understand what you do.

Specialisation also has another positive effect, which is that you are raised to the level of expert. In the same way that we imagine someone who has a PhD to be generally intelligent in all areas, the potential patient will assume that a 'specialist' in anything at all is probably pretty good at general treatment (in the same way that being a web developer means people are always asking me to fix their printer or what laptop to buy).

Lastly, don't think specialising means you can never do any other type of work ever again. The specialisation might be more for marketing or it might be more your reality, and you can market differently on different channels. You may be the 'sports injury specialist' on the poster at the local sports centre, and the 'arthritis specialist' on the poster at the over 50's club. And if something isn't working for you, you can always change it.

The Attention Bucket and the Big Idea

In a recent marketing job I was given a piece of prose that had been written as an advert for the charity I was working for and asked what I thought. I said it was rubbish. 'But you haven't even read it', they said. 'No,' I replied, 'and neither will anyone else.'

Users and consumers do not willingly give their attention to our advert, marketing or anything else, not even one second of it. They know an advert when they see one and will skim straight past without reading anything unless it somehow grabs their attention. The same applies to magazine ads, website copy, social media posts, and everything else.

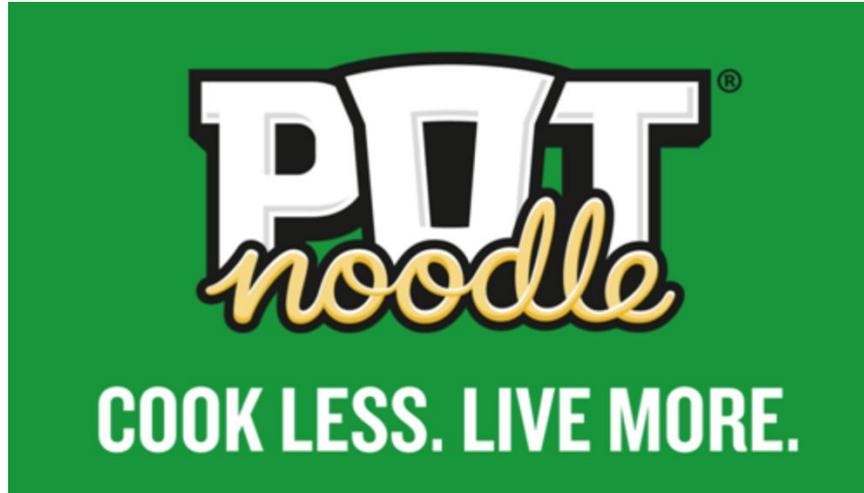
If we place an advert in a newspaper or magazine, we maybe have one-third of a second to grab the attention of the reader while they are skimming the page to see what interests them. That is what they give us in the attention bucket, one-third of a second. If we catch their attention they might pour another second in the attention bucket to look over the ad and skim the content. If we gain their interest, they might pour two more seconds into the attention bucket to actually read the copy. After 3.3 seconds we have either created the desire (more about this in copywriting) to pursue our ad further and maybe contact us and make a purchase, or they will never bother looking at it again. Fact.

As a result, in marketing less is always more. It's not about providing more and more information, listing more and more features, no-one will read it. We have to pare away our messages to the absolute core, something that can be explained and digested in less than a second, hopefully at first glance. Any longer than that, we've lost our chance.

George Lois calls this the Big Idea, and this is really the art of marketing. We want to put our lists of features and USPs in one end, and come out the other end with a sentence, image or logo which sums up perfectly what we do and who we do it for. Instant connection.

Have a quick look at these ads, all of which could have gone on endlessly about their product, but instead sum it all up by perfectly encapsulating the Big Idea. (Note they also appeal to the emotions and to living a fuller life, which we'll look at more in the next guide.)





In opinion polls,
100% of Economist
readers had one.



Experiment, Learn, Enjoy

I mentioned in the first section that marketing is an art, and we'll come back to this idea as we go through the other guides. It's a creative endeavour and we should enjoy tinkering around with our marketing as we find the best way to present ourselves to the world and the messages that resonate best with our niche.

It's this approach of experimentation and open-mindedness, of being prepared to try new things and reinvent ourselves, that will bring success in marketing. Be prepared to learn new things, but always be your own final judge on what you like. You're marketing yourself after all, and only you can create the persona you want to give to the world.