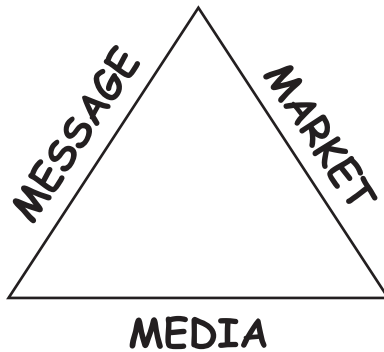


Putting Your Best Foot Forward



I have, on many occasions, been paid as a consultant to visit a chiropractor's office, tour it, check out the office's new-patient procedures, and evaluate what might be done better in order to make patients comfortable, confident, satisfied, and likely to refer. Frankly, an amazing number of times, my best advice has had to do with some 75-watt light bulbs and a bottle of Mr. Clean. Which brings us to a discussion of image; specifically, "business image."

Let's begin inside your business, at its premises. This is relevant to the degree that your customers, vendors, investors, or community members visit your business location. If no one ever visits, there's nominal damage done by a pigsty location. If even one person visits, the damage begins.

The Minit-Lube example is instructive; these guys stole an entire business right out from under the service-station owners and operators, virtually overnight, with a remarkably simple strategy: a pleasant environment. Perhaps you've taken your car to a service station and waited while getting an oil change. The waiting area had old, peeling linoleum covered with grease and two plastic chairs to sit on; a stack of hot-rod magazines; and a coffeemaker surrounded by Styrofoam cups and utensils. Now, with that memory clearly fixed in your mind, go visit a Minit-Lube (or any of its regional kindred, such as Jiffy Lube). I don't need to describe the difference. Or the difference it has made in where America gets its oil changed.

Another industry that has undergone a similar metamorphosis is the instant, or storefront, printing business. That business has been reinvented by Kinkos.

These innovators have applied lessons learned from Walt Disney and Ray Kroc: even simple cleanliness can be a powerful marketing tool.

Here's a very simple, two-question test to apply to your own business premises and everything that is seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted, or experienced there:

Question #1

In ten words or less, describe the image you want your business to project.

Question #2

Does *everything* contribute to projecting that image?

Let me give you a great example of incongruity. For most of my life, I've owned and driven Ford and Lincoln-Mercury vehicles. Currently I have a big, fat, gas-guzzling SUV and I'm proud of it. But one time, I

had a Cadillac. When I had my Caddy, I had it serviced at the best, most successful, most respected Cadillac dealership in Phoenix. As you might guess, its new-car showroom was immaculate: windows sparkling clean, floor buffed to a high gloss, lighting just so, unobtrusive music playing softly in the background.

Their service department was also smartly run. During morning rush hour, when many people dropped off their cars, neatly dressed young women greeted the customers and offered them coffee. The service technicians also were nicely dressed, with shirts and neckties. The area was kept pretty much free of grease and grime. There was also an air of efficiency that was reassuring. The service technicians each had a computer terminal and could pull up your car's service records. From the screen, they knew and didn't have to ask for your name, address, phone number, etc.

So far, so good.

The first incongruity was, I suppose, relatively minor, yet it certainly made a major, lasting impression on my mind: the courtesy cars they used to drop customers off at their offices were Buicks, not Cadillacs.

The second incongruity looms larger: the place where you settled your account was sandwiched into a narrow hallway; you stood not in a line, for which there was no room, but rather in an intimate, pushing, annoying cluster of people; you conversed with the clerks through tiny little windows; and the clerk I dealt with on two occasions chewed and popped bubblegum and was devoid of personality.

What's wrong with that picture? A lot. To be consistent with the image being conveyed by all other areas of the operation, there should have been a nicely appointed, living-room type of area where the customers sat comfortably and the clerks came to them, got the invoices signed, took the credit cards back to the accounting area, processed them there, and brought the finished paperwork back to the customer with a smile and a thank-you.

ULTIMATE MARKETING SECRET WEAPON #8 Image Congruency

Every piece of your “puzzle” should be strategically crafted to reinforce a single, central image.

I’d suggest, incidentally, that “successful” be part of the image you choose to convey. I find that, in most businesses, customers prefer dealing with successful businesses and successful businesspeople.

I can recall going with a consulting client of mine when he was interviewing and choosing a new attorney for his firm. His company was in considerable difficulty with the Federal Trade Commission at the time, so he was going to be a fat catch for whichever law firm he selected. I thought the conversation with the two lawyers at the first firm went well, but he was skeptical about them when we left. He admitted that he couldn’t put his finger on why he was uncomfortable with them; he just was. It was several hours later that the impression maneuvered from his subconscious to his conscious and he was able to enunciate his reason for discomfort: “Nothing,” he said, “was going on.” The phones weren’t ringing; the receptionist was reading a magazine; there were empty word-processor work areas; there was no typing noise. In his mind he translated that—rightly or wrongly, but in marketing, perception is reality—to mean that the law firm was unsuccessful.

Once I was counseling a chiropractor, brand-new in practice, located in a brand-new shopping center that was at a busy intersection but too new to be fully occupied with tenants. He was suffering from an inordinately high number of “no shows”: people who would respond to his advertising, schedule exam appointments, and then not show up.

His parking lot was empty.

He and his staff parked their own cars behind the center. His practice was so new that there were rarely patients’ cars parked in the lot, and there were no adjacent tenants creating traffic. “How would you feel,” I asked him, “if you started to drive up here for your first appointment?”

We got his car, his staff's cars, and a couple of rented-by-the-week Cadillacs parked in front of that office; his no-show rate dropped like a rock.

Creating a Marketing-Oriented Store Environment

If you don't have a store, you're welcome to skip this brief section.

Coincidentally and fortunately, I was at a major shopping mall recently, and, in a national chain store I won't name here, I overheard one well-dressed woman, apparently rather affluent, say to her shopping companion, "Let's go—this place is too confusing. I can't find what I want here."

I can't count how many times I've seen a store environment or at least part of a store environment designed for the convenience of the staff—not the customer! The smart store environment quite simply facilitates buying. That should be the primary consideration in every design and display decision: does it make it easier and more likely that the customer will buy?

Last week, I was in a men's clothing store and was struck by these oddities:

1. The casual slacks, like jeans and twill slacks, were intermingled with the dress slacks.
2. The necktie display was closer to the sport shirts than to the dress shirts.
3. Shoes were displayed only in the window, and then all the way at the rear of the store.
4. The walls in the dressing rooms were blank.

What would you do differently?

I think I'd group my sports clothes together in one area, and display casual slacks, shirts, jackets, and shoes there. I'd similarly group my dress slacks, dress shirts, ties, jackets, suits, and dress shoes together. I'd put framed photos of my newest fashions and framed testimonial letters up on the walls of the dressing rooms.

Here's my Five-Point Criteria for smart store design:

1. Conveys a congruent, deliberate image.
2. Presents goods in a logical, organized way.
3. Helps the customer think with “creative idea displays.”

(I was in a pet store recently and—lo and behold—in the fish section, they had a display featuring everything you'd need to set up your first tropical fish aquarium: the aquarium itself, the underground filter, a bag of gravel, a stand, a light and hood, and so on, each neatly labeled with what it was and what it did. Over by the cute puppies was a similar display titled “The Family's First Dog,” and it displayed a bowl, a bag of food, a box of vitamins, a couple of chew toys, a brush, a collar, a leash, and so on.)

4. Educates the customer when appropriate—by display, by continuous-loop video, by live demonstrator.
5. Utilizes every possibility—such as wall space—to promote, advertise, and educate.

Resource!

The number one marketing advisor to retailers is Bill Glazer, and you can get free reports and information from him at www.bgsmarketing.com. More than 10,000 retailers in menswear, ladieswear, sporting goods, jewelry, and other categories use Bill's ads, mailings, in-store signage and display strategies, customer rewards programs, and other business development tools.

Some store environment principles apply to non-store locations, too, even including professional offices. I teach chiropractors, for example, that there are only three reasons for the patient being in the office:

1. To get well
2. To learn how to stay well
3. To get inspired to refer

Every minute that a patient spends there, and everything seen or heard while there, should be related to one, two, or all three of those reasons. That means: out with the magazines, in with interesting, educational literature; out with the background music, in with continuous-loop video; out with the mass-produced paintings of farmhouses and snowcapped mountains, in with charts and posters.

An accountant accidentally heard me talking to a group of chiropractors about this and cornered me after the seminar. “How can I apply that idea to my office?” he wanted to know. I asked him, “What are your clients there for? What services do you offer that most clients need but few use?”

We agreed that his clients were there, first, to get well organized financially; second, to learn how to work in tandem with him to stay that way; and third, to get inspired to refer. We determined that financial planning and estate planning were little-used services. So, out with the magazines, in with interesting, educational literature about financial planning and estate planning; out with the generic paintings, in with relevant posters and signs. And, without a nickel of external advertising, his practice increased its total services rendered to existing clients by more than 30 percent and doubled its client base through referrals in a year.

I think just about any business can turn its environment into a much more effective marketing-oriented environment with these ideas.

One of the finest examples amongst my clientele is Gold/VIP Member Dr. Charles Martin’s cosmetic dentistry practice in Richmond, Virginia. His brand of “Smile Dentistry” is designed for people with complex or difficult dental situations, often involving complete makeovers. His target clientele is affluent individuals who value and can afford first-class care and will invest in comprehensive treatment programs.

He says that, in 2003, while I was in his office consulting with him, he had an epiphany: to attract, inspire trust in, and satisfy the type of patients he most desired, from the local population and from all across the country, he needed to create a unique physical environment that made an appropriate statement and provided far more than these patients would expect. The result was a complete office makeover, which I'll briefly describe here:

Dr. Martin's reception area now has an Italian marble terrazzo floor, café tables like those you'd find in front of a European café, high-speed Internet access stations, and another section with comfortable chairs and couches. Nestled away in a corner, there's a PlayStation gaming area. Patients feel like they are in an exclusive clubroom. Accompanying spouses or friends can relax with a cup of fresh-brewed cappuccino or latte, check their e-mail, even conduct business over the Internet while waiting. The reading material in the lounge features patient before/after scrapbooks, and books of testimonials. There is also a patient education theater, where people can view videos about Martin Method Dentistry. Oh, and did I mention the beautiful grand piano with the "secret" CD player, so that it plays itself? Walls are graced with original art but also with photographs of patients showing off their newly acquired perfect smiles, along with their written success stories.

Before, during, or after dental treatment, patients can also visit The Spa Room, with a heated massage chair, relaxing music, scented candles, even paraffin hand wax treatment. In the dental treatment rooms, the dental chairs have temperature-sensitive body-cuddling foam pads and massage pads. Headphones are provided, with music pre-selected by the patient. (For me, Sinatra.) Some patients sleep through their dental work, too.

On the way out, patients leave with their favorite kind of homemade, fresh-baked cookies. Yes—fresh-baked every morning there at the office, placed in bags closed with ribbons.

Patients are impressed. Patients can't resist telling their friends and associates about their amazing experience. And referred patients come from all over the country, flying over thousands of dentists, to get to Dr. Martin.

Dentists or other professionals reading this can get more information at *AffluentPracticeSystems.com*.

Does this seem extreme to you?

Is your instant knee-jerk reaction “not appropriate to my business”?
It’s appropriate if you want extreme success!

Boosting Your Image with Brand-Name Identity

For years, when you went to the grocery store or supermarket to buy some chicken for the Saturday afternoon backyard barbeque, you bought chicken, period. Just chicken, on a cardboard tray, wrapped with plastic wrap by the grocer. But Frank Perdue used himself as a spokesperson and his name to proprietize chicken, and today people go to the store looking for Perdue Chicken. Of course, there’s also Jimmy Dean Sausage and Bob Evans Farm Sausage.

In some areas of the country, if you look in your Yellow Pages under “Plumbing,” you may find a big ad featuring George Brazil Plumbing, with a choice of phone numbers for different areas in your locale. And if you call, the plumber who comes to your home will be in a clean, neatly pressed uniform with the George Brazil logo.

Actually, this is nothing more than an advertising identity, a form of a brand name, which individual plumbers in each area pay for the right to use. This gives each plumber a big image boost over other independent operators.

How Do You Decide Which Movie to See?

I’ve always found the movie I wanted to see and then gone to whatever theater it was playing at that was closest to my house, and I’m sure others use that same process. But a recent “Best of Phoenix” survey showed me that a lot of moviegoers use a very different process: they prefer and deliberately choose to go to Harkins Theaters. Here in our area we have theaters owned by several

national chains, such as General Theaters. Harkins happens to be a small, locally owned chain, and its brand name is recognized by many theatergoers as number one in quality and value. This chain has the cleanest theaters, most comfortable seats, and best gourmet snacks. Many people look in the newspaper first for Harkins' ads, then choose among the movies playing at Harkins, rather than choosing a movie first and then deciding on the theater. It proves that even a small, local business can create strong brand-name identity in the marketplace and profit tremendously as a result.

A Warning about “Putting Your Best Foot Forward”

Since I wrote the first and second editions of this book, I think consumers have become more demanding about the “experience” they have when patronizing a store, restaurant, professional practice, or service provider. Gold and Gold+ Glazer-Kennedy Inner Circle Members get a special memo from me each month, on a different, timely marketing topic. Here's one from 2004 that I believe is especially relevant:



Even Being Great Is No Longer Good Enough

Tom Peters' most recent book, *Re-imagine*, is a provocative book. Here are a few pickings from the book, with my comments.

“If we use terms such as ‘experience,’ we limit them to Starbucks or Disney. Instead we must apply them to the IBM's. . . .”

It IS no longer enough to think in terms of or to deliver “excellence” in your core goods or services or quality or service. We now live in, to borrow another book's title, an EXPERIENCE ECONOMY, where the consumer must be given some kind of meaningful, interesting, entertaining, involving, and memorable experience. And Tom's right: when we talk about this, we too often invoke the same few, obvious demonstrations,

like Disney and Starbucks, when the challenge, the mandate is to apply it to every kind of business. To YOUR business.

“Harley-Davidson does not sell motorcycles. Starbucks does not sell coffee. Guinness does not sell beer. Think about it.”

A Harley exec said: “What we sell is the ability/opportunity/excuse for a forty-three-year-old accountant to dress in black leather, ride through small towns and have people fear them—the Rebel Experience.” A visit to a Restoration Hardware store is a nostalgia experience.

A business, like a novel, should have a plot.

Resource!

I recommend reading Tom Peters’s book, *Re-imagine*, and Howard Schultz’s book about Starbucks, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, for more ideas about creating extraordinary customer experiences. Also, you can get a free 3-month trial Gold Inner Circle Membership at www.UltimateMarketingPlan.com.

Peters uses different catalogs, some with novel-like plots, others missing it. As a writer, I think it’s a very good point. This is yet another way to think about, to get at, a USP. A point of view. Think about popular TV shows, past and present. Most have the same basic recurring plot, known to its fans. *CSI*: murder under unusual and mystifying circumstances, defiant killer, scientific deduction. *The A-Team*: somebody, usually damsel, in distress. Outmatched, out-gunned heroes outwit villains, save damsel. *I Love Lucy*: Lucy gets into trouble, trying to do good. She and Ethel attempt to conceal the mess from Ricky and Fred, at which point it gets worse. Hijinks ensue.

What’s your business’s plot? What do your customers/clients/patients share with you, as a fundamental understanding of who you are, what

you're about, what to look forward to? For a few years now, Bill Glazer's retail stores' plot has been exciting offers featuring a different, interesting premium/free gift each time. His yearly off-premises, at-the-fairgrounds sale had a plot; two years ago, he kept the sale, changed the plot. Gold+ Glazer-Kennedy Inner Circle Member Dr. Gregg Nielsen's practice operates currently with two plots. One is the *I Love Lucy* plot: his employees have gotten into trouble; they are trying to cover it up or fix it and get out of the doghouse; hijinks ensue. (You can see a Dr. Nielsen campaign in the free 12-Week Ultimate Marketing Plan Course. Sign up at www.UltimateMarketingPlan.com.)

Here are some idea-starters:

Was vs. Is . . .

WAS

Product/Service
Quality
It works
Satisfied customer
Meets needs

IS

Experience
A kick, a hoot
Leaves an indelible memory
Member of a club
Defines who you are

Common vs. Different

COMMON

Coffee
Underwear
Atlantic City
CNN

DIFFERENT

Starbucks
Victoria's Secret
Atlantis, Paradise Island
Fox News