

# Information: The New Marketing Currency

By Susan Duensing, CBC

## Part One Build Your Bank Account

Some of the most valuable marketing material your company has isn't just what you can tout about your product or service. It's what's in your collective brains.

If we think about marketing as communicating, the following definition provides food for thought:

*"Marketing is the lifelong process of educating your customers about the value of your product or service."<sup>1</sup>*

The idea of sharing information to create value – as a precursor to a sale, and after the sale is made – is certainly not new. Yet too few companies understand and act on this route to build relationships and stay relevant to customers for the long-term. They don't usually think beyond the product or service.

Today, we see information being shared by savvy businesses everywhere. How does your company get into the act? First, build your Information Bank Account with these pointers:

**Point I You don't have to have something "new."** One of the critical skill-sets of your public relations team is to show you how to make news, even if you don't have a "new" product or service to offer. Your knowledge, whether from a company founder or manager, technician or customer service rep, can be mined for gold.

The potential topics are almost endless but must follow one simple guideline: What would customers want to know or find useful? This is why how-to articles, tips features and real-world case studies are always the best-read. It's because they are useful. Your prospect may not be ready to buy now, but when they are, who will they recall? A firm they know or have never heard of? Objective, helpful information builds trust.

**Point II What Do You Know?** Sure, you should explore and exploit all angles of your team's knowledge about the product or service you provide, but move beyond the obvious benefits and features. Explore what happens during ongoing servicing (common problems, special knowledge you bring to different situations) and even in the back-office.

A manufacturer could brainstorm around many areas, from material sources and design, to functionality or how a product compares against competitors, to its evolution and future. A service provider could address its own philosophy; special areas of knowledge that have helped customers in the past; and specific areas of staff knowledge (from previous jobs, education, life experience, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Abraham, The Abraham Group, Los Angeles.

Some of the most enlightening conversations we've had with entrepreneurs have been about their pasts, their perspectives and opinions – where they came from; how they moved up in the ranks; how and why they got into the industry or started their own businesses. A thoughtful listener can draw insights that can lead to solid marketing content.

**Point III Think like a journalist.** Put yourself in the shoes of a reporter. Because it's not about you and your company, it's about the reader. Several pointers here:

Look at the writing styles and topics you like to read *outside* of business publications. How do the authors frame the content and keep your interest? This alone can give you many ideas for developing educational content.

Put yourself in the shoes of a reporter. What kinds of questions would they ask? What would they be interested in? Commenting on industry trends and popular issues are a great place to start.

Think feature article, not just success story. There is ample opportunity to query an editor and propose a broader feature that fits their interests, rather than always trying to push a purely commercial message.

Another opportunity many miss is to conduct a basic Q&A with anyone in the company (from researchers to sales). These are easy to write and are a fresh source of surprisingly good information.

## Part Two Put Your "Money" To Work

Now that you've built up your Information Bank Account, how do spend your new currency? Keep thinking like a reporter and consider the multitude of ways you can share educational nuggets that serve your target market.

**Point III Think like a journalist, continued** In Part One, we shared tips about writing styles, wearing a reporter's hat, designing content for feature articles and Q&As. Here are a few more pointers:

What else would a reporter do besides ask good questions? He or she would talk to other people. So, expand your sources instead of always building content around a single interview source or a specific product or service. How good would your company look if it sponsored an objective roundtable discussion? Take that hot topic and include your company's executive, leaders from competing companies, end-user companies, a key industry association spokesperson and an editor.

You can also expand your sources by just including one or two others in whatever content you are preparing. Another effective way is to re-publish content authored by others (with permission and some cost). It need not be dull industry-speak. Why not share words from a motivational speaker?

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With all of these pointers in hand, conducting a single group exercise of “thinking like a journalist” with your staff should easily generate 10 solid ideas for new content to be used in various ways.

**Use content for speaking.** Speaking opportunities abound. Trouble is, they are difficult to obtain if your company is not widely known. Still it’s worth shooting for. The same roundtable discussion published in a trade book can be submitted as a speaker panel to a local, regional or national group or conference. Virtually any content you now have or can create can become a speech. Again here again, don’t forget to expand your sources. Include a customer in conjunction with your company’s rep.

**How to get your information out there.** The type of information you create will frequently dictate how and where it should be distributed. There are so many media that this should be carefully planned. Your web site is the obvious place for almost everything, but don’t just plunk your new piece in and expect the traffic to rise. You have to do something to showcase it.

For example, a perspective or opinion piece by your company’s founder can be distributed to customers (even if you haven’t had regular contact in the past). Articles can be submitted to your industry’s print and e- media, and re-used for direct marketing. White papers can be used as offers for direct marketing, on your web site, linked to industry portals, etc.

The point is that the same content can be used in multiple ways; furthermore, it can become a cost-effective way to test market to a new target.

While sky’s-the-limit marketing campaigns are not feasible for most companies’ pocketbooks, you can afford to think rich when it comes to public relations. One of our favorite questions for clients is, ‘If you were speaking to a room filled with 200 potential buyers of your product or service, what’s the one thing you’d want to tell them?’ Then find a way to couch that message into content that is educational to your audience.

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