

The Three Essential Conversations of Marketing

By Jurgen Wolff



There are three kinds of conversations that can supercharge your marketing. If you combine all three of them you can transform your results.

1: Conversations with your customers or clients

Two kinds of customers initiate this conversation: the ones who are extremely happy with what you provide and those who are extremely unhappy, perhaps because there's been a glitch of some kind. But they make up perhaps 20% of your customers, and you should also be having this conversation with some of the other 80%.

The kinds of questions you need to be asking:

- What do they like best about what you offer?
- What do they like least?
- What additional product or service would they like?
- What problem do they have that relates to your field?

It's not a one-time conversation, it should be ongoing because people's needs and their willingness to spend change with the economy, with what life stage they're in and so forth.

You can get this kind of information by asking. You can run a survey at your website or at your retail location or in your newsletter or e-bulletin. Typically, response rates to surveys are low—they tend to skew toward that 20% I mentioned before, the ones you hear from already anyway. That's why it's a good idea to offer an incentive. This can be a coupon for a discount or you can have a drawing for one or more prizes to be awarded randomly to responders.

2: Conversations with your competition

You also need to stay aware of what your competitors are offering. They may be sneaking up on you and positioning themselves to steal your customers by offering a new or better product or service. Sign up to their mailing lists, watch their web sites, look at their ads.

While you may not have a conversation with them directly, you should have one running in your mind when you look at their marketing materials. Those materials will answer questions such as:

- What's the benefit they're offering?
- What's the unique selling proposition of their product or service?
- How is it different from what you are offering?
- How are they reaching people in ways you're not?
- What's the weakness of their product that you can exploit in your marketing? (Not necessarily by criticizing theirs, but by being clear that yours offers an advantage.)

You can also imagine a three-way conversation between you, a potential customer, and your main competitor. The potential customer asks both of you, "Why should I buy from you?" What would you say? What would they say? What questions would the customer ask? How would each of you respond to those? That conversation may give you a wealth of new ideas for how to improve your marketing.

3. A conversation with yourself

We tend to get so caught up in our daily tasks that it's easy to lose perspective. That's why it's good to have a conversation with yourself once a month or so in which you ask:

- Why did I start this business? Am I still motivated? If not, what would refresh my motivation?
- Am I keeping up with the latest developments in my field? If not, when can I set aside a few hours to catch up with the key publications or web sites?
- Within the past month, have I added value to what I'm offering? If not, what could I do to improve my product or service and how can I let potential customers or clients know about it?

These three conversations are the opposite of small talk—all of them have the potential of yielding big results for your marketing campaign and your profits.

Jurgen Wolff is the author of "Marketing for Entrepreneurs" (Pearson/Prentice-Hall Business) and "Do Something Different" (creative marketing methods, published by Virgin Business Books) and "Focus: use the power of targeted thinking to get more done," Pearson). For information about his books and his online coaching program, go to www.jurgenwolff.com, where you can also sign up for a free subscription to his monthly Brainstorm e-bulletin on how to be more creative and productive.