

Becoming **The Obvious Choice** In A Sea Of Competition  
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Differentiation, niche marketing, and positioning. These and other related business buzzwords have no doubt crossed every business owner and marketing director's ears in recent years.

But what do these words really mean to you in your business? Usually they mean that a business will attempt to sell a product or service that is somehow different than the competition's to a certain, specific target market. In theory, this is a great idea. If you could just reach that one segment of the market with your great, new, innovative product...

Welcome to reality. If your company is innovative enough to develop a truly unique product or service that is earning you a profit, the following inevitably happens: competition springs up from nowhere to imitate your product or service, undersell your price, and steal your market share. It's immutable.

So as your next line of defense, you choose to position yourself as the quality leader within your field. Or as the low price leader. Or as the service king. You soon find yourself in a battle with four other companies - all claiming to have the largest selection, lowest prices, highest quality or best service.

A marketing free-for-all usually ensues. Each competitor tries in vain to shout with the loudest voice that his business is superior. Headlines get bigger, radio ads get more obnoxious, advertising agencies get richer. More significantly, customers begin to discount any claim made by any of the companies.

Is niche marketing the way to go then? Obviously, different is better than "me too." The question isn't whether or not to be different, but rather how to communicate those differences in a way that your customers will believe and embrace them. Your Real Opportunity for Innovation Lies in the Marketing.

Here's What Marketing Really Is...

You need to realize **three things about business** to understand marketing. These three things are always true, regardless of what industry you're in: 1) All businesses do just one thing: They Woo Customers - Period. 2) All customers want just one thing: The Best Deal - Period. 3) Your marketing should do just one thing: Articulate Why You're The Best Deal - Period. You can build confidence if you articulate your advantage.

This is not a complicated thing. If you dispute any of the three points, please call me to discuss it at once. I don't want to be wrong about such simple stuff. But if this is such simple stuff...then why do most businesses have so much trouble executing a decent marketing plan? I say it's because, in general, we are lazy communicators.

See if this scenario sounds familiar. When you get home from work, your spouse asks you how your day was. What do you usually say? Fine, okay, I'm tired, great, it stunk. Do these words actually communicate anything? What about when you see someone you know at the store and you ask, "Whatcha doin'?" (As if you really care or can't tell by looking) and he answers, "Fine," which is actually the answer to the other question he was expecting, which is "How ya doin'?" We are a society of lazy communicators...we are on communication autopilot. Don't think, just talk.

These communication habits spill over into marketing and advertising all the time. Show me 99% of all marketing material created and I'll show you a huge jumble of hyperbole, fluff, platitudes, and yawnably unbelievable, black hole nothing words. Words like cheapest, professionalism, service, quality, speedy, convenient, and best. These words do absolutely nothing to communicate why you're the best deal. NOTHING. Claude Hopkins, the greatest advertising man in history, summed it up: "Platitudes and generalities roll off the human understanding like water from a duck. They leave no impression whatever."

Consider an example. The city I live in has just over 150,000 people. The local yellow page directory lists a whopping 81 companies that repair air conditioners. Of those, 34 spend from \$300 to \$5,000 a month for space ads in addition to the regular category listing.

Some of the advertisers claim to be "the" experts. Most tell me in bullet points that they only charge one low rate, even if service is needed after hours or on weekends. Almost all of them tout that they fix all major brands. None of them, however, give me a compelling reason why I should call them instead of their competitors. The "unique" claims of each company have become generic, unappealing, and meaningless to the prospect...who is just waiting to be sold.

Surprisingly, very few businesses really make more than a token attempt to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Once a company stakes out a position in the marketplace, the usual strategy is to foolishly proclaim to all potential customers, "Here we are, now give us all the business that you have been giving to our competition...for no justifiable, rational reason."

Fortunately, you can cash in on what your competitors are doing wrong. The most powerful tool you can use to stand head and shoulders above your competition is the Articulated Sales Argument (ASA). Your ASA is the singular, unique benefit that your customers can expect to receive when they favor your business instead of your competitor's - stated in specific, graphically illustrated terms.

An air conditioning repair company I know of in Las Vegas harnessed the power of the ASA and tripled the size of its business in less than a year. Before developing and implementing an ASA, the company had been guilty of running "me too" advertising. Their yellow page ad (where 90% of their business came from) had the company name plastered across the top in huge letters. Bullet points let everyone know that they provided 24-hour service, they serviced most major brands, they had 22 years of experience, etc.

Because everyone else's ad said essentially the same thing and since their ad was relatively large, they were able to build a respectable business in spite of their "me too" approach. Each year, they were able to generate enough revenue to do the following:

- Add a new truck or two to their fleet.
- Keep their repairmen busy most of the time.
- Generate a small profit for the owners.
- Continue to run the advertisement.

What more could small business owners ask for? A lot more! The first step in developing their ASA was to determine what customers wanted most from an air conditioning repair company. In the 8 month long Las Vegas summer even a couple of hours without an air conditioner is sheer misery. Customer surveys confirmed their notion - fast service was to be the premise for their ASA.

But everyone else already claimed to have fast service. Some companies even put FAST SERVICE in big headlines at the top of their ads. It wasn't as if nobody else had ever figured out that being fast was important. The funny thing was that nobody else had ever figured out a way to say it in a way that would allow them to stand head and shoulders above the competition.

The next year they ran a half page ad as usual (no additional expense,) but changed the wording to say, "Because we have 58 repairmen on call 24 hours a day to man our 27 service trucks, we can guarantee that your home or business will be cool within 2 hours of your call - or there's no charge for the repair." And that was just the headline!

The rest of the ad went on to explain that if the crews were too busy to fix the unit right then or if the repair would take longer than 2 hours, portable units would be brought in to cool the house at no extra charge until the repair was completed. Bottom line, the customer would be cool in a hurry - period.

The company put a lot of faith in their new ASA based on previous test results - they actually only had 17 repair trucks and about 40 technicians when they first placed the ad. They were counting on the ad to generate enough business to afford them the additional trucks and personnel. The number of calls the ad generated quadrupled in less than one month after the new book came out. More importantly, they were able to convert 50% of the calls into jobs - up from 38% before. Gross revenues soared and new trucks were bought to keep up with demand. The end of the year profit for the owners was higher than they thought they would ever see.

Their integration of the ASA "fast service" was the key element in the company's turnaround. Obviously, other factors contributed as well, like the company's underlying dedication to fulfilling the "big promise" of fast service. But the point is a simple headline stating the ASA "fast service" increased their bottom line by over 400% with no additional advertising cost.

What's Your ASA?

The ASA really is the keystone of all your marketing. Everything else depends on it. If you are serious about harnessing the awesome power of an ASA, please consider attending a Monopolize Your Marketplace seminar.