Getting to First Base Using the Marketing Ball Strategy

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As the world opens up, networking events and social gatherings pose great opportunities to build business relationships and get the word out about your company and the services you provide.

The scenario is familiar: A room full of people mingling and discussing business while trying to make connections. When a potential client approaches you and asks, “What do you do?” your answer is crucial. This is your chance to put yourself in position to score a sale, but you must respond in a way that attracts their attention or the opportunity will pass and the person will move on. You may never get another chance.

The key is to make a good first impression and appeal to your prospective clients’ needs. But how do you do this? Is there a reliable way to get attention with just a few words and avoid the glazed-over look from prospects?

You can get this attention and interest by knowing exactly what to say. It’s like swinging at a baseball — you either strike out, hit a foul or make a solid connection. Your response to their question about what you do, when phrased properly, will get you to first base.

The Marketing Ball Strategy is a model based on the diagram of a baseball diamond. It takes some of the mystery out of the marketing and sales process. Start at home plate, go around

the bases, and then make your way back to home. Getting home means you've "scored" by winning a new client. However, before you score, you need to get to first base – where you have your prospect's attention.

First base is where every business needs to get before anything else – in a brochure, an advertisement, a website or a simple verbal introduction. If you don't get to first base, you're out of the game. After you're on first base, it's easier to get around the diamond. Second base is where a prospect is ready to explore working with you. Third base is when a client is ready to buy from you. Home base is when the sale is actually consummated.

First base is the most crucial and is deceptively simple. Just like in a baseball game, it is the initial hit of every sale. In networking situations, the hit comes when the person you're speaking to shows some interest and wants to know more. You have four different ways to get onto first base, and some are more effective than others. In fact, the first two hardly ever result in a hit, but people persist in using them.

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1. Label

The majority of business people use labels to get attention. When asked what they do, they respond with, "I'm an accountant (or a management consultant, an executive coach or a widget salesperson)." These labels may be accurate, but they sure aren't very attention-getting.

People develop their own pictures of what these labels mean. What stereotypes can you think of for lawyers or used car salespeople? Are these pictures always accurate? Of course not.

For example, let's look at accountants. People tend to think

accountants are boring. So when you reply to the question about what you do with the label, “I’m an accountant,” in the back of most people’s minds, they think you’re boring. Not much of an attention-getting marketing impression is it?

So forget labels. Don’t ever lead with your label. It makes people pigeonhole you, and it works against you almost every single time.

2. Process

When people stop using labels to introduce themselves, they often start using a process to describe what they do. Again, consider our intrepid accountant who, rejected every time he used the accountant label, now tells people that he prepares taxes and does financial statements.

This is a little better, but not by much. A process doesn’t answer the question that is on everyone’s mind: “What’s in it for me? You prepare taxes and do financial statements. So what? What’s the advantage, the thing that will help my business?”

When you talk about what you do in terms of a process, you become a commodity. After all, every accountant prepares taxes and does financial statements. There’s nothing to distinguish you and, once again, you fail to get attention.

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3. Solution

Undeterred, our persistent accountant learns that he must speak in terms that mean something to the prospect. Now he emerges with the statement, “I help people in the restaurant business reduce their taxes and increase their cash flow.”

This is a whole lot better. Mr. Accountant has targeted his market and clearly expressed a desirable result or solution he can accomplish for his clients. Using a solution-oriented response will get the accountant, and you, on first base more often. To spark interest, say who you work with and the solution you provide for them.

Here are some examples:

- “I work for high tech companies to improve the communication skills of their technical managers.”
- “I help writers who want to get their first book published quickly.”
- “I offer training for leaders who want to beat the competition more often.”
- “I provide equipment for hospitals that gives a six month return on investment.”

Remember, If you’re speaking to the right person, all of these are likely to get you to first base. And this is usually as far as most business people go.

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