That Potential Client Is Judging You So Focus on Making a Good First Impression



No, thin-slicing isn’t a phrase to describe the way you cut a loaf of bread; it’s a term that denotes what we do upon first meeting people. According to Oregon State University professor Frank Bernieri, people make immediate judgments about others from observing only mere seconds – aka a “thin slice of” – their behavior.

“From the evidence gleaned in not much more than a few glances, we decide whether we like another person, whether they’re trying to flirt with us, whether they’re friend or foe,” Bernieri suggests in a Guardian article.

Regardless of environment or circumstance, this very thin-slicing – otherwise known as making a first impression – can make or break your chances of coming across in a positive light, and it's especially crucial when vetting new business.

Case in point: Guard for the Golden State Warriors, Stephen Curry, opted against doing business with Nike in 2017 because during an in-person pitch, a Nike rep butchered Curry's name. To make matters worse, the rep left a placeholder name – Kevin Durant, Curry's teammate – in the published write-up. Because of this, the NBA player decided instead to partner with Under Armour. Say it with me: It's all about first impressions. Screw it up once, and you've likely lost business for good.

The scene is no different in the marketing industry. An owner prepares to nab a prospective client, but when it comes to awareness of his behavior and presence during the pitch, the owner can't see the forest for the trees. Even if that's not the case, the owner hesitates to identify areas of specialty for fear of leaving money on the table. The result? He comes across as he never intended: like a dime-a-dozen marketing sheep.

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While the idea of lacking complete self-awareness (especially when doing business) is highly unsettling, there's good news: If you put in the work, it's preventable.

New business is not a New Year's resolution.

Recent research from Statistic Brain found that more than 42 percent of Americans fail to meet their New Year's resolutions. Often, failure is rationalized by excuses. Heenan says marketing agencies make their own set of failed resolutions and poor excuses: "They get off the gun, and

they’re all excited, and they got this elaborate new business plan with all of these moving parts…By February, the gym is empty, and the agency efforts are quiet because ‘I got busy with client work’ or whatever.”

If you’re a company leader, it’s your job to focus on new business. No one should be more committed to growing a business as much as its company leader, period. Thus, recognizing the benefits of a good first impression is only the beginning; now, leverage it:

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1. Continuously vet new clients — it keeps your agency alive.

For marketing agencies, the time frame between meeting a prospect and onboarding him or her continues to recede. A study referenced in Hiver suggests 80 percent of leads require up to five follow-ups after an initial sales pitch is executed. That’s a lot of heavy lifting as it is, and the process will continue to linger if you don’t stay on the ball. Ultimately, this can slow down processes across the board, so constantly vetting new clients keeps an agency moving and shaking; it keeps the cogs at a minimum. Mining for prospects is an exercise — a muscle that must be flexed day in, day out.

Additionally, rely on your team to keep your current clients happy while you’re out in the trenches, turning leads into long-termers. “New client and new marketing development are critical to the long-term sustainability of any business,” says New York-based marketing consultant Nancy Shenker. She suggests company leaders spend up to a third of their time focusing on the future to generate new client growth.

2. Don’t spread yourself too thin.

Marketing agencies – and often companies in general – have a tendency to spread themselves too thin to appeal to every prospect in every corner of the world. To create this marriage (where the agency’s integrity and the potential client’s needs meet in the middle), an owner must seek clients whose goals align with his agency’s – these clients are not only ready and willing to give you money, but they’re also going to stick around for the long haul.

Overextending yourself, your staff and your business by trying to be The Most Diverse Company in the Universe means removing what makes it unique in the first place as well as the niche services it offers to clients who need and desire it. And *that’s* certainly not the best impression to make, especially if it’s the first one.

3. Know your company and yourself – start seeing the forest for the trees.

As the head of a company, you’re always putting out fires. But don’t forget to set down the extinguisher from time to time to ensure the business plan you have in place is still intact. As an example, it’s fairly common to fear your biggest client – the mammoth who brings in the majority of your revenue – is going to leave (even if the fear is unfounded), but don’t let such scenarios consume you, your vision or your plans for the future. Keep an eye on what’s ahead, and remember your company’s integrity and what it represents.

But know that seeing the forest for the trees can only take you so far. Be sure you’re always evolving yourself as a leader as well as evolving the direction of your company. It’s important to keep track of day-to-day operations, but it’s

equally imperative to remember your agency’s overall vision; you can’t move forward without it. And moving forward is what it’s all about.

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So you’re making great first impressions and leveraging them to the fullest with new business. But don’t let it go to your head. Remember: Making those impressions requires agency owners to know their company, what it excels in, who will align with it and how a prospect will react to its pitch. Keep this in mind the next time you’re vetting a new prospect because you have just few seconds to convince.

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