

COMMUNICATING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION EFFECTIVELY-DIRECTLY OR THROUGH THE MEDIA

By Sylvie Sadarnac-Studney, Principal, Kedrika Communications



Communicating effectively can make the difference between getting an assignment and getting passed over. Between being perceived as a valuable resource and being just another disposable commodity. But how do you go about influencing the perception others have of you? How can you make your value proposition resonate with those you are trying to reach? What should you say to attract and retain

clients?

We live in an age of over-communication. Blogging, podcasting, and its young cousin, “vodcasting” — not to mention blast e-mails — attempt to beguile us on a daily basis, right on our desktop. Add messages we are exposed to from traditional sources (newspapers, magazines, and 24-hour cable channels, to name a few), and it is no surprise if we reach saturation point by mid-morning!

And if it weren't bad enough, consider this: you have nine seconds (the length of a sound bite), or five words in the subject line of an e-mail, to get someone's attention. That's right: Just nine seconds, or five words, to make your case. It may be the only “9 to 5” rule you'll ever want to stick to, but it's not an uplifting one...

What are you to do? Your first step is to articulate a strong value proposition: You must shift your focus from talking about how “great” you are to what you can do for someone, and what that person will gain from using your services. A value proposition that has traction should be clear, specific, and detailed on tangible benefits to the client.

You can't communicate your value proposition clearly, however, without having developed attention-grabbing messages. To connect with your target audiences, you have to know what to say, how to say it, and when. You have to frame the issue in terms they readily understand. In other words, you need to build a solid positioning foundation.

Positioning starts with fundamental questions:

- _ Who and what am I, and what is my organization?
- _ What do I do, and to what benefits?

- _ What are my strengths?
- _ What are my weaknesses?
- _ What are my goals?
- _ Can I sum up my business in a sentence or two?
- _ Why should my prospects and clients care about me?

That last question may be the most important to answer. If you are unable to make your prospects care about you and your services, then you have no chance of closing the sale. A clear positioning statement should make prospects want to do business with you. In addition to strengthening your reputation, positioning differentiates you from the competition and allows you to create a perception in line with your reality.

Only after you have done this preliminary strategic work will you be able to define yourself and your organization in terms that “stick.” Keep in mind the following six golden rules when developing your message:

1. Use strong, descriptive words to define your value proposition
2. Be “you-centric”: It's all about the client, not about you
3. Be precise and consistent with the words you use
4. “Massage” your message — you need to sound genuine when you deliver it
5. Practice variations of your message — and practice some more
6. Reinforce your message with strong materials and awareness-building tools

Earlier, I briefly referred to the plethora of vehicles available beyond the traditional print solutions. Not all of them are appropriate for your business, and some of them can be downright tricky (blogging in particular is both a fleeting and permanent medium that could be detrimental if you don't dedicate time and effort daily to managing the information properly).

A more constructive way to go about communicating your message is to develop a comprehensive visibility-building strategy and work with third parties, including the media. A good media strategy can do wonders for your reputation, credibility, and business growth.

And before you protest that you will never have to work with the media — it's not the nature of the busi-

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ness, you may say — think about this: You could be part of someone else's media coverage — by happenstance, or as a partner. You could experience a natural disaster or man-made catastrophe that pushes you to the forefront of the news. Being exposed without a plan is never a good idea. Better be proactive and on message than spend valuable time and resources chasing and correcting misconceptions.

Implementing a P.R. strategy is smart business. It is, however, a lot of work. Unlike advertising, which uses tools that are “pre-packaged” (ads typically tout your services in your own words, and even if they include third-party endorsements, like client testimonials, they are “fixed” in time and on paper), public relations relies on interaction with a third party — in most cases, a reporter. It requires that you be personally involved. Preparation, therefore, is crucial: You will need to sharpen your presentation skills, attend media training seminars, practice your messages ad nauseam, and make yourself available to reporters on their time — not at your leisure.

When dealing with a reporter, you must understand who you are talking to and remember who you are trying to reach. The reporter, after all, is your conduit to your “real” target audience. If you are not careful in your message delivery, you may leave yourself open to misinterpretation.

Working with the media does not guarantee exposure, but at a minimum, it will confirm your position as an expert in your field.

And while you may be reluctant to spend money on a full-service public relations firm to help with both strategic thinking and execution of tactics, remember that investing time and effort into public relations, like the stock market, pays off in the long term.

Ultimately, it boils down to a simple truth: Communicating effectively is your foundation for success. Who can turn down an opportunity to grow?

Sylvie Sadarnac-Studney is principal of Kedrika Communications, a strategic communications firm dedicated to helping organizations position themselves for success (www.kedrika.com). Turning messaging into a business-generating tool, Sylvie helps clients demonstrate their value proposition, increase their visibility, and strengthen their reputation.

TIME IS MONEY!

By Vickie M. Main, Development Product Manager, Stenograph L.L.C.

“Time is money” isn't that what people say? It is no different in the world of court reporting. Whether you save time by learning editing shortcuts or writing real-time for yourself so you can edit the job during breaks — CATalyst⁴ features can save you money. Let's look at just a couple of features designed to do just that — save you money!

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