

SELL THE 'Sizzle,' NOT THE Steak!



BY GLENN C. ZARING

There is an old adage from marketing and advertising that says that you need to “sell the sizzle, not the steak!” The saying refers to a way to positively appeal to a person’s sense – in this case, the aroma of a good steak being cooked. In essence, it is the aroma, or the thought of the aroma, that whets the appetite, not necessarily the actual thought of the taste of the steak. The anticipation of the flavor is what gets people’s attention.

When we talk about tribal businesses, what is our sizzle? Is it the memory of the sound of the drum at a *jiingtamok* (powwow); the vision of a jingle dance we saw; the memory of the blanket dog made of frybread we ate last summer; or the “movie Indian” portrayed by Hollywood? What is it, good or bad, that goes through the minds of our target audience when they are considering utilizing a tribal product or service?

In other words, what is our difference when we try to bring a product or service to market? What is going to motivate a potential customer to purchase our products or to use our services? What is the sizzle of your product or service?

The answer to this question is going to be dependent upon many factors, but until you can answer it, you will not succeed. You also need to answer it before you go

into production or start soliciting business. It is really that simple!

Let’s say you are like the Oneida Tribe in Wisconsin who raise some outstanding beef cattle. Then, think about Kobe beef from Japan. Both offer something special in their product: wonderful meat! The Oneida beef is kept from the flavor enhancers and chemicals many producers use. The Kobe beef is from hand-fed, pampered young beef who produce some of the most tender, flavorful meat available on the market today. Top dollar is paid for these products.

If you have a C-store, like my tribe does, they have a deli that offers excellent sandwiches, salads, coffee and great specials. They also offer the food cooked to order at very reasonable prices. The kicker is that there are no competing fast-food outlets within 5 miles. They are literally the only game in town for a market within a 10-mile radius (being at the entrance to the tribal gathering grounds helps too).

Our sizzle is convenience and quality! It is easier for you to get to our deli, buy your “cooked-for-you” food, something to wash it down and, oh yes, while there, you might as well gas up your vehicle. This is not glamorous or sexy, but it sells to an ever-increasing customer base. As long as the market stays the same, the deli

will do well. When a fast-food restaurant comes into the market, then the “sizzle” will have to be adjusted.

That’s life in the marketing realm. Nothing works forever, and all techniques should be reviewed on a regular basis. This is a lesson for another time, but keeping an unbiased eye on your business relationship with your customer base helps you stay ahead of the challenge and will help you to succeed in the long term (...think seventh generation, as elders teach us).

After you make the initial sale, what is going to keep the customer coming back for more? Was the product of sufficient quality, competitive price and value that your customer will need more of it? Was your customer service above and beyond that of the competition? Was the sales experience enjoyable? Was the billing accurate and easily understood? If there were some problems, were they taken care of to the satisfaction of the customer?

As you consider these questions, please realize that if you cannot positively answer all of them, you are creating an opportunity for your competition to come in and steal your next sale. ♦

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