

The Selling of the Presidency

2008 Version

Every four years I talk a bit in the newsletter about the lessons to be learned from political campaigning. There was a lot to talk about in this one.

This “report” is just a compilation of a few issues of my newsletter, TalkBiz News. I've reformatted it a bit, to make it easier to read on the printed page. It's not as focused as a commercial product, mind you, but I think you may just find some of the ideas in it useful. And for at least one of the issues, useful outside of business as well as inside.

You may distribute this document freely, provided it is left intact. (No, you can't change it.) There's no fancy formatting, and the language is casual, as it usually is in the newsletter.

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TalkBiz News
Wednesday, October 7, 2008

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Hi, folks...

Before you ask, no. I am not going to try and pitch you on a candidate. That's not why you subscribed. Besides, I'm an independent. I'm no more likely to buy a party line than to join a conga line.

I think you'll find this quite useful, despite the absence of my [cough] highly sought-after political sophistication.

(I have, however, set aside a few gigs of storage space
for those who want to tell me what I should think. So, if
you feel the need to screed...)

Warning: I AM going to get into some subjects that a lot of people consider explosive. If you're easily offended, delete this issue right now.

On with the show.

"The Selling of the Presidency"

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I had an interesting conversation with a friend recently. He's a moderately sharp marketer, and very bright guy. When I asked what he'd thought of the first Presidential debate, he informed me that he didn't bother with politics.

Said he'd rather spend his time studying marketing.

Ooof.

"Delta, we have air space."

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Being polite, I didn't press the issue. I figured I'd wait, and make him look silly in front of a few thousand of my closest personal friends.

Here we go:

Duuuuude... WAKE UP!

Look, I don't care if you think they're all crooks, or you think they're all great guys and gals, or

if you look at voting as a choice between the evil of two lessers.

If you're a student of marketing, you're missing the boat.

Every four years, the United States presents the world with the most comprehensive lesson in marketing that you can imagine. The only thing that's different from other forms is that everyone has (or is supposed to have) the same amount of "currency."

The stakes are enormously high, so the folks behind the scenes are among the best in the world. Every bit of the campaign is available for examination by anyone who wants to make the effort, and there are professional analysts explaining every commercial, every speech (sales pitch), every debate (product comparison), and every interview (branding opportunity).

Any and all potentially useful channels of advertising are tracked and evaluated for effectiveness. Messages are tested and refined.

And you get to see the background data on every bit of it.

All of it. Data that results from tens of millions of dollars in advertising by some of the best marketing minds on the planet.

Note that I'm talking about the folks behind the campaigns, of course. The candidates themselves aren't always the sharpest bulbs in the forest.

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For example, it's nearly certain that, if the election were held as I start this article (Friday afternoon, October 3, 2008), Barack Obama would win the popular vote by a landslide.

As of today, a combined average of the polls shows Senator Obama with 49%, Senator McCain with 43% of the vote, and 8% undecided.

After last week's debate between the vice-presidential candidates, the ratio of undecideds who made a choice went to Obama over McCain, by a 2:1 margin. If that held for the rest of them when made to choose today, which is a reasonably likely scenario, statistically, that would add about 5% to Obama's vote total, and about 3% to McCain's.

Call it 54% to Obama, and 46% to McCain.

How does an 8% margin constitute a landslide, and what does this have to do with marketing?

We're getting there.

Consider: There is a certain portion of the voting public who will vote for their party's candidate, no matter what. They may or may not actually know anything about them. That doesn't matter. Their vote depends solely on the ability of the party to get them to the polls.

There's argument about where that line is. For the sake of example, let's say it's 30%. That seems to be about the number that's most resistant to approving of the other party's elected

officials or disapproving of their own.

So, you take off 30% from each candidate's totals, to see how good a job they did with the prospects who count most. That leaves Obama with 24% and McCain with 16%.

That translates into Obama getting 60% of the convinceable votes, compared to McCain's 40%

THAT is a landslide.

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The base numbers came from <http://www.fivethirtyeight.com/>

If you want to see just how much information you can get on this stuff, that site is an excellent example.

It's a campaign geek's wet dream.

Those numbers will change, of course, as we get closer to the election. The thing to remember is that, the closer you get to actual voting, the smaller the impact of any single event or revelation. This is why momentum becomes increasingly critical as the months and weeks pass.

At some point, it won't matter if one of the candidates is caught, as one editorialist put it, "torturing puppies in a bordello."

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Okay. It is now Monday, October 6th. As you might expect, the numbers have changed.

Why? New information, new messages, and new circumstances affecting the consumer (voter). Leaving aside the Bradley effect, Obama would still be a shoe-in. But that could change.

Ignoring it is fine for PR, but, as a candidate, you can't afford to.

The Bradley effect is the difference between non-black voters who say they're going to vote for a black candidate and those who actually do.

That is a huge marketing lesson right there.

People often say one thing when polled, and do something completely different when their money (vote) is on the table.

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Lots of people in campaigns write this off as racism. To some degree, that's true. Sadly, there are plenty of racists left in America.

A much greater factor is one that's largely ignored by political analysts. The vast majority of people for whom the Bradley effect comes into play are not racist at all.

You see, racists usually won't say they're going to vote for someone of another ethnic or racial group. If they're trying to cover up, they'll come up with less politically objectionable reasons they're voting for the other candidate, in an effort to get more people to move in the same direction.

The Bradley effect is something much more basic and much less evil...

Fear of the unfamiliar.

For those people, it's not about race at all. It's the same thing that keeps most middle-aged professionals from going into biker bars, or hanging out with skateboarders.

"Those people aren't like me."

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Now that I've managed to make a whole lot of people angry or uncomfortable, let's consider why I'd even bring up such a topic in a marketing context.

By the way, I am aware that even talking about this subject is considered explosive. People don't want the mirror, if it applies. They don't want the discomfort of having to think about something they believe is wrong (racism), and still fear might affect them anyway (by translating fear of the unknown into something more).

The reality is, this exists. It is a factor in the results.

Ignoring it, or explaining it in a convenient way that makes people out to be villains, is tempting. It's also stupid.

We, as marketers, tend to either be unaware of such factors in our own niches, or to explain them away, or to ignore them as unavoidable.

Also stupid.

People make decisions emotionally. Your message must offer logical support for the decision, but if it lacks appropriate emotional appeal, it's not going to work.

If you want to learn how to address such an issue politically, Google "Bradley effect" - without the quotes. My point is only to show that such things exist and that they **MUST** be addressed, no matter how uncomfortable, if you want to get the best possible results.

I'm going to assume you want to do that.

Every market has some equivalent(s) of the Bradley effect. The question is, how do you identify and correct for it?

You may already know what it is, of course. If you don't, it's easy enough to find.

Ask people what they'd do in certain situations, and then test them with real decisions. If their answers don't match their actions, you've found an instance of this effect in your market.

It may be something in attitudes. You might find that men say they trust fitness training more when presented by other men than by women, and find that they actually buy the other way.

It could be something logistical, such as pop-ups. While complaints about pop-ups in general are nearly universal, there are some markets and uses where they are extremely effective.

Again, people often say one thing and do something completely different.

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For the logistical issues, you don't really need to do a lot of thinking. Test, and go with what works.

There, it's a simple matter of believing what they do, rather than what they say. It doesn't require a lot of understanding of the difference.

For the psychological stuff, the why of the thing is critical.

Using the hypothetical example of men saying they prefer fitness instruction from men, while being more likely to buy it from women, knowing the reason can be very helpful.

Note that I made that example up. It could well be completely wrong, but it's useful for purposes of explaining how to overcome such things.

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The majority of these discrepancies can be explained by the "not like me" issue. People, for some reason, don't relate to you, share your values or beliefs on the issue in question, or feel that you have their concerns at heart.

In this example, it may be that the respondents feel that women are more empathetic, and more concerned with their students' success than men. It could be that men feel that women are better and more patient teachers. Or, it could just be that they'd rather watch a video of a fit woman while working out than a fit man.

You would test for this by adding, changing or removing various parts of your message that relate to each possibility. Adjust your message to address the various things you believe might be behind the difference.

If you're a guy facing this market preference, you might try language that shows you understand the concerns of your prospects (No, this doesn't mean you have to get "sappy.")

You might try adding a female co-instructor to your videos.

You can test including samples of the videos on your sales page, with slightly different clips chosen to see which aspect is more effective.

A woman benefiting from this market edge might extend her advantage by doing those same tests.

Watch the results.

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You need to be very careful in assuming the cause, unless you can get solid data to back up your explanation.

Going back to the effect of color on political campaigns, ascribing it to simple racism is dangerous. It makes villains of the people in question. At that point, you will tend to ignore them as irrevocably lost votes, or to choose a strategy that ends up alienating them further.

Addressing the wrong cause will rarely get the right result.

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Going back to the fitness example, another approach to understanding it is to ask separate groups of people about their level of satisfaction with various teachers, and watch for commonalities.

If they say they prefer the female teacher because "she's a babe," you know what you need to do in your sales materials. If they say it's because "she seems to understand that I'm looking to get healthy, not look like a gorilla," you have a different strategic approach.

And yes, I know I'm going to be accused of sexism for that suggestion. Reality is like that. Some guys prefer to look at women rather than men. The reverse is also true.

I knew I'd be aggravating people with this issue. May as well annoy all the hyper-sensitives at once, right?

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Now, back to the general theme of elections as marketing lessons...

Look at what these guys do. Every single thing is measured. They do so many tests that they know what message factors and strategies are likely to work in which areas. They cut the country up into different demographics, and use different approaches designed to fit each.

And, as demonstrated by Senator McCain's recent withdrawal from campaigning in Michigan, they carefully monitor the ROI on their advertising. To see how carefully, look at that site again:

<http://www.fivethirtyeight.com/>

They show the relative ROI for each candidate, in each state.

Look at the methodology they use. This is extremely intricate math, with a remarkable number of variables factored in.

Note that the operators of the site are open supporters of Senator Obama. It appears from the methodology that they try to keep the math as accurate and independent of their personal preferences as possible.

That is an example you should follow.

You don't need this kind of math for your business. You DO need to consider tailoring your message for different traffic sources, and you need to measure it.

Most people fail to do this. They create one type of message and look for traffic sources that respond to it.

That's throwing money away.

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On the flip side, campaigns often concede entire states (markets) which they know are unsympathetic to their candidate. In the fitness business, this is the same as not marketing your course on a site devoted to computer gamers.

Even though there are undoubtedly gamers who are fitness-conscious, the percentage is low enough, and their attention otherwise focused when on those sites, that the ROI is negative.

There may, however, be sub-markets that are profitable to explore. For example, folks who play Wii Fit might be a profitable market for "soft" fitness programs, like Tai Chi or Pilates.

This sort of creative segmenting of markets can often lead to extremely profitable campaigns in areas that are ignored by your competition.

This strategy is applied in Presidential races to only a very limited extent. Most states give all of their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the popular vote statewide. Nebraska is one exception to this. They assign electoral votes based on the popular vote in each Congressional district.

Senator McCain is a lock in western Nebraska, where Senator Obama has no chance of winning and no sense competing. Obama is campaigning in the Lincoln area because that district is at least a possible win.

The advantage you have over Presidential candidates is simple: You don't have deadlines and you don't have "all or nothing" buying decisions within groups.

You can also adjust your message without everyone who missed the first one knowing about it.

That's not as easy when you're being watched and analyzed by people who explain your every move on national television...

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Another thing to learn from is the different set of messages given to folks who're already committed.

"Get out the vote" campaigns are useful for those who've said they plan to vote for your candidate. This is the same as following up with solid prospects. If they've said they're interested, by asking for information on a product, you can be more direct in your presentation and call to action.

If they've already "bought," campaigns will ask them to help the cause by promoting the candidate to their family, friends and neighbors.

Brings a new meaning to the phrase, "political affiliation," doesn't it?

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The first key to getting the maximum advantage from the lessons offered by the campaign is to look carefully at the messages themselves, and how they adjust to changing conditions in the race.

The folks writing these are master copywriters. The TV ads are classic examples of short copy, designed to get you to listen to the longer message. They tend to be rather blunt instruments, but they do most of the heavy lifting.

The speech writers are the real artists in the business. If you read one speech with a truly critical eye, you can learn more about appealing to what matters to your listener/reader than in most complete books on the subject of sales or copywriting.

Talk about a swipe file!

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The second key to learning from this mass of information is to watch how the candidate and his or her staff develops the machinery of the campaign.

How do they promote their message?

How do they follow up with committed voters? What about their approach to undecideds? What systems do they have in place for getting volunteers to join the effort?

The big lesson for you in this campaign is the speed at which Senator Obama built his machine. That is, not coincidentally, why he's been mentioned much more than Senator McCain in this piece.

The Republican party spent a lot of money and a lot of years using direct mail to build their

databases. It was probably the single most expansive and effective development and use of lists in the history of direct marketing.

Until this year.

Think about it. A junior Senator from Illinois put together a fund-raising machine and volunteer corps that enabled him to beat the Clintons, the most effective political campaigners since Ronald Reagan.

That's nothing short of amazing.

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How did he do it?

A powerful message, focused directly at the most activist part of his base, and intelligent use of the Internet.

The function of money in a political campaign is to buy access and attention. Obama used the much lower cost access granted by email lists to leverage his access and build the biggest group of individual contributors in American political history.

He used the resulting contributions to expand his more traditional advertising, which increased his reach and added to the credibility of his online efforts.

The function of advertising dollars in marketing is to buy access and attention, hopefully turning that attention into interest and, eventually, customers.

Whether you like him or not, you can learn a lot from his example about using the Net to expand your own business.

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I highly recommend a book on the subject of campaign politics, called "The Political Brain," by Drew Westen. You can get it at Amazon, for much less than most ebooks on marketing. The lessons in that book are profound, and apply directly to selling commercial products and services.

And, if you don't think politics are a good use of your time, I suggest you rethink that position. The lessons in a presidential campaign are worth fortunes to you, if you translate them to your own business.

Any serious student of marketing should study what these folks do. They're playing for very high stakes, and have the talent and experience to be in the biggest game there is.

If you can't learn from them, you're just not trying.

Paul

Note on that issue: Yes, I am aware of the arguments about the current reality of the “Bradley factor.”

They don't apply to the types of market responses I am encouraging people to watch for, so it would have been counterproductive to bring them up in the newsletter.

On to the next issue...

TalkBiz News
Monday, October 20, 2008

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Hi, folks...

Once more into the breach, my dear Meanies...

"More On Politics and Profits"
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I expected a lot of grief over the issue on viewing campaigns as marketing. I mean, when you even mention politics, racism or sexism in a business newsletter, you have to think you'll get at least some hate mail, right?

I got none.

Some surprises are pleasant.

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What I did get was another example of people interpreting things to fit their existing beliefs, rather than seeing what was actually there.

One fellow was absolutely certain he knew who I support for President. He blasted me for my foolish choice. (His guess: Senator Obama.)

Another fellow praised me for what he was certain was my Presidential preference. (His guess: Senator McCain.)

Funny thing... They both seized on the exact same points to arrive at their faulty conclusions.

You can count on this happening.

In fact, counting on it can make you money.

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Yes, one of those gentlemen is my choice for President. So, how can I say that both conclusions were faulty?

There is absolutely no evidence in that article to suggest which way I'm voting. None. Personal friends, people who know my political beliefs well, don't know and couldn't guess from that piece. It's unlikely that a stranger could.

In the marketing trade, we have a technical term for a conclusion reached with no supporting evidence: a WAG.

Wild-assed guess.

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This ties directly into the concept behind the "Mindreading website" trick, and the tendency of people to interpret things in ways that support their beliefs.

To illustrate, let me tell you what these guys seized on as evidence for their conclusions:

1. I made a point of mentioning the openly stated preference of the owner of the site I pointed you to.
2. I mentioned Senator Obama more often in that piece than Senator McCain.
3. I pointed out WHY I mentioned Senator Obama more often than Senator McCain.

The first was nothing more than proper disclosure of a potentially relevant fact. The second was explained logically by the third, which was that Senator Obama might be affected by "the Bradley factor," and how you can spot those types of issues in your own markets.

Assuming you know which way I'm voting based on those things is like assuming you can guess my vote based on what I had for breakfast.

Today, it was black coffee, red grapefruit juice, sausage, eggs, and waffles.

Sure, it *sounds* conservative, but the waffles were Eggos.

Blueberry, no less.

Fact: Any time you insert a qualifier, people will try to interpret it. They want to know what you think, even if they have to invent explanations from nothing.

These guys don't especially care what I think, personally, about the candidates. Their need to resolve any unknown is what made them look for answers.

That's an important thing to remember. Leave the wrong questions unanswered and you're going to lose sales. Worse, you'll make some sales based on incorrect assumptions that people supply for themselves, and which could end up with them claiming you misled them.

Imagination is a useful thing in selling. There are some places, though, where you want to be very specific.

Pay attention to which of those categories fits each part of your sales process.

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Trust me on this.

I've had plenty of experience with people insisting that things they saw in salesletters which I've written for clients were outright lies.

The fact that nothing like what they thought they read ever appeared in those letters doesn't faze them. It hasn't stopped some of them from pushing their delusions as fact for years.

Yeah. In one case, it's 5 years and counting.

"Captain... There be idiots here!"

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Before I go on, in order to avoid offending people unnecessarily, let me tell you something about my perspective on politics. It comes from my perspective on people in general, and bears heavily on your ability to sell.

I understand both the conservative and the liberal urge. They are both valid, and have useful sides.

They are, in fact, both necessary parts of a sane society.

Without liberals, we have fascism.

Without conservatives, we have anarchy.

I'm not fond of either result.

Balance is the key.

That said, did you notice who BOTH of the gentlemen who felt the need to assume my preference supported?

Senator McCain.

That was also predictable, as was the fact that nearly 100% of the considerable number of political forwards I started getting as a result of that issue were in support of the same candidate.

Why?

As a general rule, conservatives are much less comfortable with unknowns and unanswered questions than are liberals.

This is neither good nor bad, on either side, unless carried to an extreme. It's simply a natural consequence of one's chosen philosophy.

Likewise, the closer you get to either extreme of the spectrum, the more the individual focuses on dogma, rather than principle or practicality.

This applies in very real ways to running a business.

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To take some very obvious examples, consider how you might apply these tendencies to selling computer security software and a copywriting course.

In the case of security software, you are appealing to a conservative market. Even the most liberal of thinkers goes into conservative mode when they look for firewalls and anti-virus programs.

The nature of the product sets the mindset of the prospect.

In a case like this, you want as close to zero unanswered questions or open-ended statements as possible. Prospects want to know what you cover, how often you update the thing, how reliable the data is, and what impact it will have on their systems.

They don't want creative. They want something that will keep their systems secure.

Here's where you can run into the assumption problem. The buyer is looking only at one thing: Protection from external threats.

More precisely, external threats of which he is aware.

A lot of computer security products make the host system unstable. A number of these suites make installing some commercial programs difficult or impossible. And many of them will mistake legitimate components of useful products for spyware or other malware.

For users who aren't aware of these problems, the only thing a seller needs to do is say nothing. Keep the focus on the strong points, and don't mention that your software makes 87% of users' machines crash regularly. (Fictional number, made up for example purposes. But probably not as ridiculous as it sounds for at least one of the Big Anti-virus Vendors.)

In a case like this, leaving out that data seems (to me) to be irresponsible. But it's what they do.

They talk about what they have, and what they don't mention is "invisible."

Remember the mind-reading website? It set expectations, and fulfilled them, without beginning to do what it led you to believe it would do.

It disconnected the promise from the premise.

Sneaky, but a lot of people bought it.

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For the vendors whose products do the job without these negative effects, you want to pull back the curtain. Tell your prospective customers that you can give them the level of protection they need without the crashes and hassles your competitors' products create.

That's easy enough.

Here's where it gets fuzzy.

Let's assume you have a product that avoids the system instability problems, but is only 90% as effective as your competition in terms of preventing external threats.

How do you market that?

If you're keeping the importance of your customers' data in mind, the answer is...

Very carefully.

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A lot of companies would promote such software like this:

"The optimum balance of data protection
and day-to-day operating stability."

They could go on to explain how their software "protects you from the most common threats most users face, without making your system unstable. This avoids potential loss of data from the crashes and software errors caused by many other security products."

Perfectly legit, assuming you update the libraries often enough for "the most common threats" part to remain true.

This type of copy, however, depends on something that's very common in many markets, and especially so in the anti-malware game.

Very few of the prospects for these products have any real knowledge of the threats they're trying to avoid.

The closest analogy I can think of (and it's not really precise) is a doctor prescribing medication without pointing out possible side effects or drug interactions.

There's not much risk of a computer crash, even without data backups, resulting in permanent injury or death. (Unless it crashes on your head from a floor or two above you.) The similarity lies in suggesting a solution for a problem without disclosing all the possible consequences of adopting that solution.

Here's why this is a fuzzy area: Almost no-one outside the computer security field knows, or wants to know, enough to properly assess the merits of the various offerings.

All of these programs have strengths and weaknesses, and they all involve trade-offs.

Given that fact, an advertiser has to choose which things to emphasize and which to play down or ignore. That creates temptations, which many find irresistible, to make their product look superior to the competition in more ways than might actually be true.

From the perspective of a consumer, this raises other serious issues. Since so many products involve things about which we know very little, how do we see through the choices made by the merchants to find the real truth?

And how do we do it without spending the time to become an expert, at the cost of our other activities?

This is another area where the political campaigns can provide a useful example.

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Take a look at the unbelievably negative campaign for President this year. (I've watched this stuff for 3 decades, and this really is the worst I've seen.) There's a mountain of irrelevant issues being raised, and a disgusting amount of pure disinformation being spread.

While there's no single solution, there are two sources that can be immediately useful.

<http://www.factcheck.org> is a site that digs into the truth of claims made by candidates and parties in the elections. By every measure I've seen, they're accurate in their assessments.

<http://www.snopes.com> is a site that checks into and exposes the kinds of rumors, urban myths and other bizarre and extreme claims that circulate via email or on web forums.

Check them out. You may be surprised at how distorted some of the things are that you hear from the various candidates.

Or maybe you won't.

The same sorts of misleading things can happen in advertising, if you can believe it...

Really.

Honest.

Oh. You knew that. (Never mind.)

To find the facts without having to learn every little detail behind them can be as simple as my approach. Ask an expert, but make it one who has nothing to gain from your decision.

The trick is to make sure the expert knows your requirements and priorities. In the case of security software, I'd tell them what sort of data you need protected, what kind of connection you have to the net, exactly what steps you already take to keep your system safe, how important it is that your system remains stable, and what backup procedures you have in place.

When they tell you what you need, ask them what the next step up in security is, and buy that.

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A more common alternative is to look for independent review sites for the kind of product you need.

The trick there is making sure they really are independent. It's become even more common than ever for people to try and make money by creating "review" sites that drive traffic to whatever product pays the best commissions.

Some of them are sneaky.

For this, you want to ask around. Look for reviews of the reviewer, if you can find them. Don't take one or two gripes on a forum too seriously, as they're often just sour grapes. Serious issues that are repeated may warrant looking elsewhere. On top of that, sites that have been around for only a short period could, even if sincere, lack the experience to be dependable.

When you find a good review site, you want to do two things. The first, of course, is take their recommendations.

The second is to note what it was about them that made you believe they had your best interests at heart.

Do exactly those same things in your own marketing.

Yeah. Tell people what your product is good for, who will benefit from it most... and who may want to use something different.

Listen. If your product is fine for the home hobbyist, but not up to protecting a corporate network from hackers, say so. The home hobbyist will buy it because of the lower cost, and

you won't end up with hassles (and maybe lawsuits) from companies that relied on your advertising and suffered losses because of it.

Address the conservative tendencies of your market.

Give the people what they want.

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Now, on to an easier category: Copywriting products.

This is sooo simple. Tell them what you're going to teach them, and then get their imaginations going.

This type of product involves a much more liberal mindset. People are looking for possibilities, growth and excitement. Yes, they want results, but they're mostly focused on potential.

If you tell them what's actually included in the product, they'll know for themselves if it's stuff they've already learned, or something that will move them forward.

Unlike security, copywriting is a process where learning a little at a time is not only acceptable, but desirable.

A security product that only stops a single type of attack is almost useless. A sales technique that improves one area, and leads to more sales, makes it easier to afford the next step as well as providing the motivation to do so.

Contrary to what you'll hear many people say, you don't have to sell the dream. They already have it. What you need to sell is the ground to put under that dream.

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Back to the earlier issue, and the focus on campaigns as a model for business processes.

As you watch them working, notice how each step of the campaign leads to the next. How every change elicits an adaptation by the candidates.

For instance, Senator McCain is down in the polls at the moment, and faces a tough challenge in the electoral count. So, in today's speech in Missouri, he focused on his base, and played the underdog card. He also spent a lot of energy on pushing the "socialist" label onto Senator Obama.

He's re-allocated resources to concentrate on the most likely prospects (states), and he's hitting the chords that most often motivate the voters in those states and get them to the polls.

He's campaigning on their fears, rather than their dreams. From a strictly marketing perspective, that's smart. At the moment, fear is the stronger emotional driver.

If your prospects are conservative and in a tight market, with limited resources, you may need to do the same thing.

That is often a winning strategy.

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Senator Obama, on the other hand, is flush with cash and has a lead in the polls. Despite that, his speech today included not only the call for his supporters to vote for him, but the request to volunteer, to make phone calls and to get others to the polls as well.

Turning his "customers" into "salespeople."

He knows that things can turn, and turn quickly. He also knows how easy it is to become complacent and be unready for the changes that will come as election day gets closer and the race narrows. (It nearly always does.)

He is attempting to leverage his position into greater momentum in the market. He knows that nothing kills momentum faster than trying to coast over rough terrain.

Another useful strategy.

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The goal for most businesses should be to use BOTH of those concepts. Develop resources and processes that are dedicated to each approach.

Or, and this is especially easy with many online systems, integrate the various approaches so they complement and strengthen each other.

Watching the conservatives develop their base over the past 3 decades shows that this can work very well even with slower offline methods. Watching Senator Obama's integration of online and offline methods in this campaign shows the power available in the virtual realm.

If you doubt that, consider: In September, he raised more than twice what he raised in August, and August was a record month.

Again, I strongly suggest watching political campaigns for the lessons they can bring you about marketing, even if you have no interest in the politics at all.

The best education in marketing you'll ever get.

And it's free.

....

Keep in mind that, just like in political campaigns, things in your market may be different than you think. Polls and surveys may tell you the what, within a certain margin of error, but they can change quickly.

If you don't keep an accurate view of what your market is thinking, and what's really important to them, you may find them leaving you for the other candidate.

Enough on that for now.

Go watch a speech.

Then look over your ad copy. Think about your product positioning. Tighten your message.

It's an enlightening exercise.

Paul

This next one was sent out with the subject line, "Okay. So I'm a moron."

TalkBiz News
Friday, October 24, 2008

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Hi, folks...

Welcome to another exciting issue of TalkBiz News. I can see that you're barely able to control your excitement, so let's get right to it...

"Sigh"
=====

I just got off the phone with a woman who had accidentally unsubscribed while looking for a link to use to recommend the newsletter to a friend.

That link wasn't there.

Oooops.

Okay. So I'm a moron. She was far too kind to say such a thing, but that's how I felt when I realized I'd been leaving that info out.

Proof positive that, no matter how long you do something, you'll never get every detail right. Assuming I remember to take my Old-Timer meds, I'll try to include that in the footer in future issues.

If you want to recommend the newsletter to friends, just send them to <http://www.talkbiznews.com>

If you want to change addresses, use the unsubscribe link at the bottom of the newsletter and then use the one above to sign up at the new address.

If you spot me doing other stupid things, please feel free to point them out to me. I'd rather feel stupid for a few minutes than be stupid for years...

Thanks, Colleen. It was a real pleasure speaking with you.

"Comic Book Psychology 101"

=====

While speaking with Colleen about the series on political campaigns as marketing lessons, I was reminded of something I'd wanted to cover: The apparent need for people in high pressure situations to turn disagreements into moral conflicts.

This relates very strongly to your business. For the moment, though, let's continue using campaign examples to illustrate the point.

It's always useful to poke fun at people who live for power over others.

....

In the political arena, we see Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-MN, suggesting the media ought to investigate our elected officials to find out who's pro-America and who's anti-America.

Just what we need: Joe McCarthy in lipstick.

We have Republicans stirring up racial hostilities, Democrats talking about class warfare, and folks on both sides questioning the patriotism of people on the other.

With the exception of Ms Bachmann, whose comments were about as un-American as anything I've heard from an allegedly serious person in this election cycle, this is all just frustration looking for vindication.

Ms Bachmann had no need to feel frustrated. Right up until she made her ill-conceived suggestion, she was pretty much a shoe-in for re-election. Since then, her opponent has received a massive influx of contributions from people all over the country; people who don't want anyone like her having any say in our government.

That's one lesson about turning someone you disagree with into a villain. It's easy to become nothing more than a distorted caricature of yourself.

Michele Bachmann: Comic book psychology at its finest.

The problem is simple. Our egos try to create some explanation for unresolvable disagreement that allows us to feel superior. The easiest way to do that is to make the other guy "the bad guy."

Come on, people. Does anyone really believe that Obama or McCain are trying to destroy America?

Seriously. Let's be real.

Yes, there are huge differences in their approaches to the goal, but they both have the same goal. Making the US a better, safer country at home, and making us a more effective force for good abroad.

Sure, they both want power. That's part of the psyche of anyone who'd run for national office. You don't run for President of the United States without that.

Sure, they're both slanting things. That's part of the process. An unfortunate part, but a part nonetheless.

But suggesting that one or the other is somehow evil, or has "dangerous intentions?" Calling McCain a warmonger, or Obama a terrorist sympathizer?

That's crazy. But a lot of otherwise intelligent, sensible people believe one or both of those allegations.

The question is: Why?

....

Well, for one thing, Americans are brought up to believe in winning. Some people carry that to the extreme. If you don't believe that, just watch the people in a bar when they find out there are fans of their arch-rivals in the place, cheering for 'their' team.

Many of us have replaced the desire for excellence with the goal of winning, and we don't care whether we actually deserve the sought-after victory.

Instead of trying to be the better player, we drag our opponents down.

It's easier to beat them that way.

....

That's really not as big a part of it as I might have made it seem. The more serious problem is when we're unable to connect with someone else's arguments or experiences. When we can't understand the differences between sets of basic assumptions, and thus are unable to understand their approaches.

Since most of us only really understand one philosophy (on a given issue), and given our

tendency to assume we're right (or why else would we even care?), we fall into the problem of orthodoxy on that issue.

Since we know that our own motives are good, we assume that anyone who disagrees with us must have bad motives. (Crappy logic, but it feels right.)

When we're feeling generous or self-righteous, we allow that the other person might be confused, or just "doesn't get it."

Sometimes, when we don't have a really big investment at stake, we get the feeling there's some sort of block in the communication, like the other person is speaking a completely different language.

So...

Which of those have you done this week?

....

This is not a primarily American mistake. It's something people throughout the world do.

We don't only do it in our politics.

I know a lot of people who look at others with disdain because those others don't see relationships the way they do. They frequently make comments that start with, "If you really care about somebody, you would..."

Know anyone who does that? (You might want to check a mirror, just to be on the safe side.)

I frequently hear and read comments to the effect that, "Any person who is serious about their business will..."

Another variation is to look at someone else's way of handling an issue and say, "A true professional would..."

Do you see how those last two could interfere with your ability to work with others in your industry?

Maybe just a little?

....

My favorite in the business vein is the guy who creates what he believes is an indispensable product, and can't sell it. He will quite often say things like, "These people are idiots! How can they not see that this will..."

Want a really safe bet?

The guy did no research into what his market really wants. When you hear this from someone,

take a look at their product and see if you can spot the things the creator didn't bother to mention, or which they twisted into some language the market doesn't speak.

Look at the features, which they will have explained in truly painful detail. Translate those into benefits.

Then buy him out, or make a deal to sell the product for him at a premium commission. Or get a similar product created that focuses on what the market says they want most.

Watch the look of total confusion on his face when you make a fortune on something he said people were too stupid to buy.

Sound harsh? Maybe it is, but that guy was never going to make it selling to that market anyway.

....

Want an even harsher dose of reality?

Almost every time you feel frustration or experience failure in anything that involves communication, you've made the same mistake as that guy. Or the person/group you're trying to communicate with has.

Or, more often, it's both.

....

With very few exceptions, whenever a person gets annoyed because someone else doesn't do things their way, you're dealing with unsatisfied expectations.

The exceptions revolve around situations where the responsibilities of each side in a transaction are spelled out, clearly and in advance. The degree of clarity needed is usually only present in commercial contracts.

Wedding vows are the most commonly raised "exception" to that statement. "Love, honor and cherish" seem pretty obvious to a lot of folks.

If you don't think there's a different meaning and set of expectations for each of those words, for every person who uses them, you're in for some serious heartache.

Upstanding citizen? Great patriot? Loving parent? True professional? Good neighbor?

I'll bet you that for every one of those phrases there are hundreds of distinct definitions, with hundreds more shades of meaning for each. And every meaning has a different set of expectations attached to it.

Oh, what a tangled web we weave, while never meaning to deceive.

Expectations are funny things. They're VERY personal.

For the most part, they're based on our definitions and experiences, our personal preferences, and our assumptions about how things work or should work.

In the political field, consider the divide between the country folk that many liberals look down on as "rednecks" and the city folk that a lot of conservatives sneer at as "the liberal elite."

If you really want to understand the streak of fierce individualism and self-reliance that runs through the majority of rural conservatives in this country, I recommend that you Google the phrase:

lyrics "A country boy can survive"

Read those lyrics.

(The second entry has the more accurate rendition.)

That is a powerful self-image, and one that is justly held by a lot of rural conservatives. If you're a liberal, look at the world through that filter, and see if their perspective doesn't make perfect sense.

That's how the world they deal with every day works.

Next time you want to look down your nose at "those rednecks," remember: They feed you. And if it all goes south, they'll do just fine, thank you very much.

When the grocer runs out of food, how will you do?

Still feeling superior?

....

I'm not aware of as succinct a summary of the liberal mindset, so I'll try and demonstrate that with an exercise.

To understand the liberal position, you first have to consider the probability that most people are basically good, that no-one actually wants to be poor, and that it's not right for folks to be abused for things that have nothing to do with their character or integrity.

You also have to assume that there's a difference between earning honest money and taking advantage of people who are in tough spots in order to take ALL of what they earn for yourself.

When a liberal talks about people exploiting people, they don't mean the first group. They mean the second.

Now, for the example...

Some members of my family, a couple generations back (my mother's uncles), worked in the coal mines of southern Pennsylvania and West Virginia. They lived in coal towns, and they weren't paid in cash. They were paid in "scrip," which was "money" you could only spend at the company store.

The prices the company store charged were so inflated that workers became dependent on the company, going into debt to them to get groceries and other supplies they needed for their families.

Hence the line from the old Tennessee Ernie Ford song, "Sixteen Tons" (One of my favorites):

"Saint Peter don't you call me, 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store."

These people were sucked in by false promises, trapped by their desire to provide an honest living for their families in difficult times, (along with the brutality of the company bulls), and forced to work in conditions that were guaranteed to kill many of them.

In the mean time, every penny that wasn't necessary to keep them barely alive went to The Company.

Think about the position those people were in for a few minutes. To quote another line from that Ernie Ford classic, "You load 16 tons, what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt."

If you find that offensive, congratulations.

You're a liberal.

....

If you did either or both of those little thought exercises, you've just discovered (or remembered) the most powerful tool you can have for dealing better with people in every aspect of your life:

The ability to see the other guy's point of view.

I didn't say you needed to agree with it, mind you. What's useful here is the realization that comes from that ability:

In almost every situation, there are no villains.

Expectations are what we use to justify making villains of good people. If you lose the concept of villains (except for the very rare person who truly is just evil), and abandon unfounded expectations, your life will get a whole lot easier.

So will your business.

If you put together a product and approach people about working with you to promote it, you will usually do it with expectations about what will get those people to work with you.

If they don't decide to work with you, those expectations will fail, and you'll assume there's something wrong with those people, or with you. You'll become frustrated and want to place blame somewhere.

Hardly an optimal response.

If you approach those same people with no expectations and are refused, you'll be open to more rational explanations. Maybe it was the wrong product for their market, or your offer wasn't what they wanted, or your approach turned them off.

Hell, you might even ask them what they'd want in return for working with you. (Wouldn't that be a novel idea?)

If you have no assumptions (expectations expressed as beliefs), you're free to adjust your approach. You don't feel frustrated, because there was nothing there but an opportunity. A possibility, and only one out of many, many more.

If you leave out expectations, you look at every experience, no matter what the outcome, as an education.

If you have no expectations, there are no failures. Only lessons.

Before you decide that I'm talking a loser's talk here, consider: If you get the maximum lesson from every activity, and you adjust your approach based on what you learn...

Do you think you just might improve faster than by getting frustrated and blaming the lack of results on other people?

Do you think you might succeed faster?

Expectations don't keep you from getting feedback, but they do often keep you from learning from it and adjusting to it.

That loss turns a lesson into a failure.

....

I'm going to show the hubris of quoting myself. From "The Idea Spot," my book on practical creativity:

"Expectation: An assumption with a hook."

"'If I do X, then I'll get Y. That's the way it works.' You assume the relationship between X and Y, and further assume that the someone else who's supposed to deliver Y agrees with that, without their having said so."

"This is just begging for problems.

"When you don't get the rewards you expected, you blame and resent the person you expected to deliver them, even though they never agreed to (or likely even knew about) the expectations.

"Most people have expectations in virtually all areas of their dealings with other people.

"Major bad mojo. And virtually always the source of much unhappiness. There's very little that's as unpleasant for a person as when their expectations collide with reality.

"Why does this happen?

"Simply, because we tend to assume that everyone else has the same values, beliefs, social mores and standards as we do ourselves. We learn things throughout our lives that seem to be commonly accepted, and we act as though they're immutable decrees from 'On High.'

"We all need to just get over it."

Blatant plug: <http://www.theideaspot.com>

Probably the most genuinely USEFUL thing I've ever written.

....

Would you like to have real power in your dealings with others? The kind of power that leaves everyone happy and better off for having dealt with you? If so, lose your expectations.

Learn to deal in preferences.

Expectations often feel like ultimatums. "If you loved me, you'd quit wearing purple sneakers."

Tell me that wouldn't seem like an ultimatum.

"I'd rather the green moccasins" or "I like the pink boots better" is a statement of preference.

Aren't those much more comfortable things to hear?

Maybe not so tasteful, but comfortable.

If there are things you want to do, don't feel guilty about telling someone, "I'd prefer to..."

If there are things you'd like other people to do or not do instead of what they're doing now, tell them, "I'd prefer that you..."

There are very few instances in which you have any business making demands of other people. In virtually every instance, it's fine to say, "I'd prefer this," and choose your path based on whether that preference is met or not.

The key there is that you are assuming responsibility for your own choices, rather than castigating someone else for theirs.

That's a powerful position to be in.

Villains not required.

....

One of the great things about acting on your preferences is that it makes you much more respectful of others acting on their own.

It may sound odd, but there's a remarkable sense of freedom that comes from completely giving up the desire to control other people.

There's also a very effective marketing advantage in wanting everyone to act on their own preferences. The key to opening that lock is to simply ask them what their preferences are.

Market research, prospecting for affiliates, sales copywriting - all of it is made more focused when it's built around finding out what people want and giving it to them.

If they say no, and you don't feel the need to try and control them, you're also less likely to react in ways that will close that door forever.

You don't make demands. You don't even make requests.

You make offers.

You accept whatever response you get, understanding that the other person is making a choice based on their own goals, rather than making a judgement based on you or your product.

Much easier on everyone, no?

....

Okay. This has gone on longer than I'd intended.

Comments are, as always, welcome.

And if you want to get a lot more ideas on making your life simpler, coming up with better

solutions to problems, and generally being more creative and focused, take a look at "The Idea Spot."

<http://www.theideaspot.com>

Enjoy!

Paul

And, as of this writing, the most recent. (Still warm from the oven.)

TalkBiz News
Monday, October 28, 2008

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Hi, folks...

This issue skips around a bit. A bunch of short takes, so to speak. Blame it on ADD. But don't skip it.

"False Advertising?"

=====

Someone asked today if ebook cover graphics are a case of false advertising. The idea being that people might buy thinking they're getting a real book, and be mad when it turns out to be a download.

Very unlikely, since most folks read enough to see that it's a digital product. Still, there are occasionally people who miss that, and write the merchant later, wondering when they're going to get the product in the mail.

How common that is depends on your market and your sales copy. You need to be clear, but you don't need to panic about it. The number of people who get cranky about it is exceedingly small.

Still, the question prompted a thought. It might be useful to some of you...

There's a real opportunity for you graphics folks if you can come up with a cover style that communicates the idea of a downloadable digital book or report clearly.

Something to think about.

It's refreshing to see someone who's concerned enough about their customers to want to avoid even such an unlikely confusion. Especially in the Internet marketing field, where folks are often a bit more cavalier than they ought to be.

Do you look that closely at your sales material, to be sure that the expectations you're setting are being perceived the way you intend them?

Another something to think about.

"Speaking of Expectations..."

=====

When I mentioned John Ritskowitz' book, "The 6-Figure List," in an email on Saturday, some folks who went and looked at the "site" seemed to expect a long-form salesletter.

Come on. I warned you that you could read the whole thing in a minute or two.

Don't let the brevity fool ya. If you're tired of wasting time with systems that don't work, or trying to "sell" to people who don't already want what you've got, get this one.

<http://www.talkbiz.com/cgi-bin/db.pl?6figures,wr>

This is the same kind of hard-core, business-focused detail that Paul Hancox includes in his books.

Very serious stuff, with a serious guarantee.

I highly recommend it.

"More-On Expectations"

=====

The recent issue, with the subject "Okay. So I'm a Moron," drew some extremely insightful feedback. Well, most of it, anyway. One fellow responded with:

"Why would I want to take advice from a moron?
Unsubscribe please."

Dude just didn't get it. The clearest evidence of that is in where he placed his request: He quoted the entire issue, putting his comments at the bottom.

Right below the unsubscribe link.

Ladies and gentlemen, Homer Simpson has left the building.

A lot of the comments centered around the thought that the ideas about dealing with expectations in that issue relate to a lot more than business.

Very true. Any time you talk about mindset, you're talking about something that affects everything you do. Long-time subscribers will know that I tend to focus on that sort of thing. There's a reason for that.

Business is about living, not the other way around.

....

One of the people who responded to that mentioned that she'd been getting this little e-rag for a long time. I checked, and she was right. Almost 4 years.

And she'd never commented before.

A while back, I said something that got some folks riled up. One was a gentleman who had been getting the newsletter for over 10 years, and also hadn't ever sent in any kind of feedback.

10 years, and not a word!

But, on the plus side, he was still reading it.

....

I have a request. Let me know what you think of what you've read in this report:

mailto:paul@talkbiz.com?Subject=Hey_Paul!

Basically, just raise your hand and let me know you're out there and actually reading the thing.

"Commence Launch Sequence"

=====

Back to politics as marketing for a moment.

One of the lessons in watching an election is how they manage the process to get a lot of people to take a desired action on a specific date.

They start with motivating speeches, to get you enthused about the candidate.

They follow up with details of their policies and promises, to establish credibility.

The whole time, they're registering voters in areas that are likely to support their positions.

They use repeat contacts - called "touches" - to build urgency. They remind you that there's

only one opening, and that it will be four more years before you get another chance to vote.

Then they finish up with more motivation, bigger promises, and a huge "get out the vote" operation.

Sounds like a product launch, eh?

....

If you don't think you can learn a lot about selling from watching elections, you need to look at it from these kinds of perspectives.

The fun thing is that you can learn a lot of the stuff that more commercial launches never show. That's the advantage of an open electoral process, after all. Everything is right there for you to put under the microscope.

For example, the "sales letter," the collection of issues and positions they use to motivate you at the end of the process. Just like in more commercial online product launches, it's usually not done until days, even hours, before you see it.

Yes, really.

The whole process is a feedback loop. Every message is measured for effectiveness and uptake by the people following it.

If you've never been involved in a big launch, you'd probably be surprised to know how often copywriters and consultants get called in to help refine the message, or even re-work it completely, at the last minute.

In one massively promoted launch that I'm familiar with, the original sales copy was scrapped, and a whole new letter started... 13 hours before it was scheduled to go live.

It's all about managing your message.

And your timing...

"Really Long Sales Copy"

=====

One of the questions that pundits will be analyzing for years is something that a lot of people are missing completely:

**How did a junior Senator from Illinois manage to go up
against the best political duo in modern American politics,
the Clintons, and beat them?**

That's much simpler than it looks. Senator Obama used a fairly standard format for a sales letter, adjusted for the political market.

He started out with soaring oratory, to get the focused attention of his market. He then went into "wonk" mode, talking about individual policy positions and details. Next, at the end of the process, he'll close with a summary of those positions, an inspirational close, and a strong call to action.

Watch his half-hour show tomorrow, and see if he doesn't follow that exact formula.

Make no mistake: You're going to see a master salesman at his very best. This is not a lesson to be casually missed.

The formula is as old as selling:

- Strong headline.
- Bold promise.
- Establish the premise.
- Build credibility.
- Bulleted list of benefits.
- Summary of major benefits.
- Restate the promise.
- Create excitement.
- Call to action.

It's a simple thing. If you've ever wanted a formula for a salesletter that works, there it is. Anyone can do it, and it will get you selling while you work on improving.

Assuming you have a promise that people care about, the difference between "okay" and "superb" results is in the delivery.

Delivery can only be learned through practice.

Go. Practice.

....

Don't forget to drop me an email and let me know you're out there.

While you're at it, make sure you grab a copy of John's book. It's wrapped around these very concepts, but gives the exact details you need to apply them to building a list of serious people, who already want what you've got to offer.

Not much helps sales more than that.

<http://www.talkbiz.com/cgi-bin/db.pl?6figures,wr>

Enjoy!

Paul

-----===(*)=====

Find this useful? Buy me a beer!
<http://www.buy-paul-a-beer.com>

Tell your friends about us. We'll treat 'em right!
(The first cup of coffee is on the house.)
Send them to <http://www.talkbiznews.com>

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"100% of the shots you don't take don't go in."
- Wayne Gretzky