

## **DRAFT 1**

### **Article #1**

Headline: **Why too many businesses forget their customers.**

Sub-headline: **They sell a solution to a problem that isn't even there.**

**How you can avoid doing the same.**

As a business you need to provide a solution to a problem. That solution has to be more effective, more efficient and provide results faster than your competitors. That's not easy in of itself, but where owners fail in building a consistent upwards trajectory of success, is when they choose to ignore their customers when all of the signs are pointing to the need to listen to them. Worse, they fabricate a solution to a problem that serves themselves before their clients.

You can avoid this trap by staying conscious of a few key habits.

#### **Looking in the wrong places**

Declining sales and market share, a lack of customer engagement, frequent negative feedback, a high churn rate and limited growth opportunities are just some of the most common ways a business can track failure. There are others. What differentiates a successful business from an inferior business are their different responses to these signals of decline. Simple, at least in theory.

On the one hand we have the most common, arguably misguided, ways to approach the solution to these problems. Typically, a business may want to increase their marketing expenditure, but without examining the underlying causes. They may rush to find the red marker so they can frantically scribble a higher percentage point to the already discounted item. They may launch new product or service lines, opting to hide the issues under some hole-ridden see through blanket of new innovation. Worse, they may decide to copy their competitors, opening the door to difficult brand positioning issues.

Ultimately, what all of these remedies are responding to are the issues in the business, not what the signals are saying. It's like hearing morse code for SOS, but instead of altering course in response to save the survivors, you choose to stop to fix your ship. Meanwhile, those overboard are now conducting their own mini versions of Jack and Rose goodbyes.

Additionally, and you tend to see this more with larger businesses, but the appetite to risk can reduce, stagnating innovation and a willingness to put the customer first. The logic goes something like this: 'we have investors to satisfy, significant sunk costs, a board to prove ourselves to and the costs of innovation are exponentially high'. What then tends to happen is a heightened threat response that forces the business to focus inwards, in the wrong direction. Not too dissimilar to an actual organism.

### **Looking out before looking in**

So, the solution may be obvious, do the opposite, you need to do what you can to fight against this urgency. You need to remain committed to the primary focus at all times, your consumer. Even as your business is declining, your customer base is shrinking, you don't want to fall into a panic mode. You need to focus externally.

Here are some ways to do this.

1. Take a strategic pause. Akin to taking a deep breath, you need to allow time for your organisational nervous system to stop for a second.
2. Conduct a systematic body scan and problem-storm. No-judgement allowed, what are the issues you are facing, where are they located?
3. Start to shift externally. Research, research, research. Investing time and resources to deeply understand the dynamics at play with your target audience will keep your responsiveness to their signals highly acute.
  - a. Pay particular attention to customer feedback. Use social media, run surveys, hold mid-project focus groups. Gather, analyse and respond to both the negative and the positive.
4. Shift and experiment. Now with your research in hand, you can shift around the internal motors in response to your feedback. Run smaller bite sized projects that will, through iteration, feed into a larger innovation or provide a fix to your problem. The solution/product will shapeshift as you generate

more inputs from customers, as will how you re-organise yourself internally but in response to the customers' needs.

5. Build relationships and a community. Develop a supportive, open and honest forum of discussion. Encourage customers to share their experiences, connect with others and from this, you will find out what you need to change.
6. Measure, measure, measure. With your newly attained customer-centric wealth of information, coupled with the changes you've made, you can measure, adjust, re-target, test, deliver, then run it again.

When you look at these suggestions, it's not difficult to see why the first reaction to a declining business is often the most instinctive, but also the worst. You end up solving your solution to the problem, not what the customer is asking for. When you realise this, that ultimately your falling statistics can largely be due to a lack of detailed customer insight, you know you need to switch your mentality. Now you have some tools to help you do so.

I hope this has helped.

If you enjoyed this, please like, follow and provide feedback in the comments. Did you like this article, didn't you, let me know. But please, remain constructive.

Very best,

## **Article #2**

Headline: The Art of Wearing a Mini-Skirt on your Head(line).

Subheadline: The reasons why your head(line) needs more attention than any other part of your body(copy).

*"On average, five times as many people read the headline as they read the body copy."* - David Ogilvy, Father of Advertising

It also takes 8 positive impressions to undo one negative first impression.

In business, just like in life, the first impression, the first words that greets your readers' eyes will colour the relationship they have with you for the foreseeable future. Potentially for quite some time. You don't want to mess it up.

When you're marketing your service or product, when you're writing your headline, it's not your only job to grab attention. You need to ensure you are providing enough attraction to stop them in their tracks, but not so much that the reader will get what they want then move on.

You want to maintain interest throughout, from start to finish.

It all starts with what you are wearing on top.

### **Enter the mini skirt (principle).**

Frequently used in copywriting, the idea is straightforward, the difficulty lies in getting it right. Just like a mini-skirt, you want to make sure your headline is short enough to be attention-grabbing but long enough to cover the essentials. You need to be able to tease but not deliver.

Effectively writing a headline then needs to be concise, to the point while conveying all of the necessary information to make the reader continue.

Give away too much and you won't be remembered for anything but the first sentence. Too little, you may come across as linguistically prude, so there simply won't be any interest to see the rest of the body (copy).

Just to clear the air, I'm not talking from experience. I don't wear mini-skirt...much. Just on Friday nights.

You want to develop a magnetic headline that will attract readers and customers who don't just bounce away, they want to stay.

### **What are others wearing?**

Some examples where this principle is utilised to its full effect.

- Emotional levers can be laid bare concisely. AirBnB's 'Belong Anywhere', is a great headline that speaks to the core of the brand's philosophy. It compels those looking for their next adventure to dive into their website and offer, whilst directly triggering the primal drive to be a part of a tribe.
- Evernote's 'Remember Everything', speaks to the specific use case can. The headline clearly highlights the key benefit of using their app whilst alleviating a common pain point. It's concise, memorable, clear and leaves it open to interpretation without giving too much away.
- Speaking to the environment the target market inhabits, Dollar Shave Club's 'Shave Time, Shave Money' makes the value proposition clear, whilst connecting with the market's desire for cost efficiency. Again, it doesn't give too much away, it's intriguing so you want to understand more. How can they save you money?

Whilst the marketing budget for these companies are much larger than what you may have to hold, the methods behind getting to a headline as impactful as these remain the same. Key in-depth market research and avatar building that isn't confined to basic demographic information but further explores the primal, environmental, psychological and financial situations the target is going to be experiencing.

Yet, once you have such contextual data, you need some advice on how to craft the line itself.

### **Wearing it with pride**

It would be counterproductive to provide a formula, as frankly one can't be written. Yet there are ways in which we can subtly apply techniques that will increase the potency of the headline:

- Throw a powerful punch right at the start. Commanding and attention-grabbing words in headlines will hook the reader from the start. Use emotional, visual, auditory and olfactory language. Think about contrasts, mystery, humour, movement and the myriad of additional copywriting techniques available to you. Unleash the weight of your arsenal through the narrowest of barrels.

- Focus on clarity and brevity. Avoid unnecessary words or jargon. Strive for simplicity. Maximise word economy.
- Know your reader. You have to be clear on who you are speaking to, where they are now, where they want to go.
- Where do you want to take them? How do you want them to feel when they read your headline? The headline must contain a promise linked to their biggest pain and their largest desire.
- Match the reader's language. If you've conducted your research well enough, you'll know the sort of words the market frequently uses. It builds a connection, it helps them understand you, and you understand *them*. It shows you are on the same level, that you care, that you want it to work out between you.
- Prioritise emotion over logic. Humans make decisions based on emotions then justify with logic. How can you amplify the emotional resonance?
- Highlight the benefit. Help the reader identify the benefit of reading without giving away the prize. As above, you want to hint but don't reveal.
- Curiosity is king. Ask a thought-provoking question, tease a surprising revelation, use a bold statement, suggest there is valuable information.
- Seek Inspiration from successful headlines. Analyse a top player in your niche. Deconstruct what makes theirs so successful. What are the ingredients they are putting together to form theirs? Can you create a similar recipe?

When optimising your headline, wearing a mini-skirt on your head(line) doesn't need to be complex, but it's not easy, yet you need to ensure you spend your time weaving it together.

We've explored a small handful of companies who have exercised this principle well, AirBnB, Evernote and The Shave Club. You could easily add in the likes of 'Just Do It', 'Think Different', or as I've seen most recently, 'Perfecting the Art of Below-the-Belt Grooming' and 'Don't Let Your Sleep Take You Hostage'. Not sure what the last says about the market but that's a different matter.

That aside, you can see why companies spend millions on advertising, and to continue to quote from Ogilvy - "When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents of your dollar". The more careful you are in constructing your hypothetical mini-skirt, the higher emphasis you place on its priority, the greater the

allure of your overall message will become. Done right, your brand will stick in the mind of the consumer, your products will more likely sell.

It all comes down to the way you craft the headline.

You don't want it too thick or too thin. Not too long, not too short.

The mini skirt of your head(line) has to be just the right length.