

more effective marketing

Traditional forms of marketing are not always effective and advertising is rarely cost-effective. Robert Craven believes you can implement more subtle techniques to reach potential clients.

■ **Why do 'normal' forms of marketing often fail to deliver for firms these days? I can think of at least five reasons right away:**

- lack of commitment
- lack of a clear benefit
- poor positioning – you need clarity about what it is that you offer and why customers should come to you
- KISS – 'Keep It Simple Stupid'!
- paralysis by analysis combined with dull thinking.

If all your competitors are competing on the strength of the usual banners (fast, smart, value) then why should people bother to buy from you if you are just the same? Now is the time to look at your practice and try to differentiate yourself on at least one significant criterion.

We live in a world where we compete with *similar* practices that employ *similar* people with similar qualifications with *similar* wage packets to use *similar* software and hardware to produce *similar* products that are sold at *similar* prices through *similar* channels to *similar* customers. Similarity and mediocrity abound wherever the customer might look. And the good news is that if you are just 5% better or different than the competition then you will stand out a mile!

what's to be done?

Look at your practice through the eyes of the customer. Why should they buy from you? It does actually make sense to separate yourself from the masses rather than run with them.

your website or brochure

Most of your competitors claim to be roughly the same. Most of them employ similar brand or web designers and between them they create very similar websites and brochures that claim roughly the following:

- we offer value for money
- we deliver on time using recognised methods and approaches
- we employ well qualified staff with good credentials, experience etc
- we have a history of important clients, some of whom have written over-flowing but probably anonymous testimonials.

'To survive in today's marketplace, you need to do more than simply copy the competition. That is a recipe for mediocre performance'

And finally, there is always the line about "what makes us different from the rest is our obsession with customer service" or some such similarly empty line.

Frankly, I think this is all garbage! There is too much sameness in the accountancy industry; too much safe differentiation between the various competitors. In reality, there is an over-supply of participants. To stand out you do need to be different.

what makes you different?

However, you might stand out as different in the mind of the customer if you promoted one of the following characteristics:

- you possess a list of testimonials from recognised characters – endorsements and results-focused stories rather than just testimonials
- a real, money back, no questions asked, guarantee
- payment on results only
- a free trial period or 'health check' because you know that they will buy later

Any of these characteristics could make you stand out as the expert in your field.

summary

To survive in today's marketplace, you need to do more than simply copy the competition. That is a recipe for mediocre performance. You won't be remembered as you slip amongst the blur of mediocre providers all providing a 'much of a muchness'. You have been warned. ■

Robert Craven is a keynote speaker and author of the best-selling business books *Kick-Start Your Business* and *Bright Marketing*. As MD of The Directors' Centre www.directorscentre.com, the consultancy for growing businesses, he works with ambitious owner-managers to break through constraints on business growth.

He can be contacted on 01225 851 044 or see Robert talk at the free Let's Talk More Profit and Bright Marketing events www.directorscentre.com/lets-talk.php