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### The ten rules of powerful communication

Frank Luntz is a master of communication. As a political and marketing consultant he has impacted elections around the world and made millions for his corporate clients. Frank Luntz describes his business as, “testing language and finding words that will help his clients sell their products or turn public opinion on an issue.” He does extensive research and testing to determine how to frame a message for maximum impact. Luntz has come to understand the importance of connecting with an audience on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. He has said, “80% of our life is emotion and only 20% is intellect. I am much more interested in how you feel than how you think.” Frank Luntz is a controversial figure, many people disagree with his politics, but no one disputes his effectiveness as a communicator. He has also written several excellent books on communication and created the “Ten Rules of Successful Communication.” You’ll find these rules listed below along with some thoughts on applying them to selling advertising.

#### **Rule #1 Simplicity**

Frank Luntz advises his clients to use small words and simple phrases. He has found that when people are confused or can’t grasp the meaning of a word they will reject your message. Our business, like any other, has evolved its own vocabulary. It is easy to forget that our customers don’t know what a “double truck” or a “reverse” is. It is our responsibility to explain everything in the simplest terms, ideally by showing the customer an example. When a customer doesn’t have to struggle with the words we are using, they can devote that mental energy to considering the program you are offering them.

#### **Rule #2 Brevity**

Another great communicator, Franklin D. Roosevelt once said the secret to giving a good speech is to “Be sincere, be brief, be seated!” Though he comes from the other end of the political spectrum, Frank Luntz is in full agreement with FDR. Your prospects have limited attention spans and too much information can overload their circuits. Luntz’s research found that it is far more effective to drive home one or two key points than to inundate the prospect with many reasons to advertise. The secret to achieving brevity is being well prepared before the call. Taking the time to think about what you want to accomplish on the call and how you plan to communicate your message will keep your presentation focused and on point. A rambling, disorganized presentation lets the prospect’s mind wander and wastes their time.

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### **Rule #3 Credibility**

We all filter everything we see and hear. It is human nature to evaluate the source of any information presented to us. Your prospects know that you are a sales person; that you are there to get them to spend their money. To establish your credibility you need to present evidence supporting your proposal. Third party sources such as audits, testimonial letters or success stories lend credibility to message. “Because I said so” doesn’t work any better on customers than it does on your children, you need to support every assertion you make to customers.

### **Rule #4 Consistency**

Consistency is tied directly to credibility. If you say one thing on one call and something different on the next, why should the customer trust you? For example, if you tell a customer that a display ad in the paper is the best way for them to advertise one week and then tell them the same thing about an insert or special section the following week, your credibility will evaporate. It is also important that your body language and facial expressions match your words. Customers are very good at detecting insincerity.

### **Rule #5 Novelty**

If your prospect has been in business for more than 23 minutes, he or she has heard a lot of advertising pitches. Your company and all of your competitors have probably presented the same products over and over to them. This is in addition to all the other sales people they see on a daily basis. It’s no wonder that prospects often zone out during sales calls. To keep the customer engaged you need to break this pattern; you need to do something different. You need to come up with creative advertising ideas and creative ways to present them. If you can make the customer smile or tell them something they haven’t heard before, you increase your chance of making a sale. For example, I was asked to make a presentation to the advertising committee for the local Dunkin Donut stores. They set aside a day and scheduled ½ hour appointments for all the local media outlets. My appointment was at 11:30, so I was the sixth presenter they saw that day. I began my presentation in a monotone saying, “I want to describe my company’s marketing model.” I could see their eyes rolling and they started thinking about lunch. I then reached into my bag and pulled out a large box of “Munchkins” telling them, “We use the Munchkin marketing model!” I used the donut holes to explain the flexibility we offered and how each store could target just a small area. The group became animated and engaged. By doing the unexpected, we were able to win 100% of their print business in our market.

### **Rule #6 Sound and texture matter**

Professional presenters use their voice and their choice of words as tools to hold the prospects attention. They vary the volume and tone of their voice to put emphasis

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on key points. Their speech has a rhythm that is almost theatrical. Steve Jobs was a master of this. I recommend watching one of his Apple product launch presentations online and notice how he uses his voice and a careful choice of words to make key points. His famous “oh and one more thing” phrase functioned like a giant flashing neon arrow pointing to the feature that he wanted people to remember about the new gizmo he was releasing.

### **Rule #7 Speak aspirationally**

The best way to connect emotionally with prospects is to talk to them about their dreams. Customers don't dream about advertising. They do dream about where they want to take their business. They fantasize about being successful and prosperous. If you can show a prospect how advertising will help them achieve their dream, they will be anxious to go with your program. When you make a recommendation you need to reference their long-term goals. “Mr. /Ms. Customer, this ad will reach everyone in the area and move you one step closer to achieving your goal of being the most popular restaurant in town.” Is much more powerful than, “Your ad will reach X number of people.”

### **Rule #8 Visualize**

Frank Luntz has great respect for the power of words but he also understands that we live in a visual culture. It helps to paint word pictures, but it is even stronger to use real pictures. Using visual aids such as charts, sample ads, and spec ads helps the customer understand what you are proposing. I work for a direct mail shopper so I have a full size mailbox that I sometimes take on calls. I will walk into a call with it under my arm and invariably the prospect will ask what I am up to. I will tell the customer that I don't want them to forget what sets my product apart from our competitors. The mailbox is both novel (see Rule #5) and visual. The mailbox makes my presentation much more memorable.

### **Rule #9 Ask a question**

Questions are the power-tools of communication. When you make a statement, a prospect can choose to listen to you or they can let their mind wander. When you ask them a question, they can't fake it; they have to engage with your words in order to answer you. Adults don't like to be told what to do, and they may misinterpret a statement as a command. A question forces them to think and helps them to come to their own conclusion about advertising with you. Instead of telling the customer, “Advertising will help you get through the recession.” Ask them, “What are you going to do to get through this recession?” Questions stimulate a prospects thinking and once their wheels are turning you can talk to them about your products.

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### **Rule #10 Context and relevance**

Everything you say should be relevant to the customer's needs. Human beings are inherently selfish. We make decisions based on what course of action will provide us with the optimum benefit. Prospects will only buy advertising when they feel it will help their business grow. For this reason the conversation should revolve around their business and their problems. You should only mention your products in relation to how they can help the customer's business. If you are talking about your circulation tell them we reach "thousands of potential customers for your business;" if you are describing a proposed ad layout you should say, "this ad is designed to tell your potential customers that you have the lowest price in town." Anything that you cannot tie directly to the customer's business is irrelevant, and should be removed from your presentation (see Rule # 2 brevity).

### **Making the connection**

Charles Dickens wrote that "A wonderful mystery to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to that profound secret and mystery to each other."

The challenge of being human is to penetrate that mystery and connect with another person. Before we can accomplish anything we need to communicate with the people we encounter, sharing what is in our mind and learning what is in theirs. Frank Luntz's "Ten Rules of Successful Communication" provides a set of proven techniques to connect with our prospects. If you learn these techniques and play by Frank Luntz's rules, you'll win the game of selling advertising.

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

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