

7 Ways to Stand Out From the Crowd



A strong brand identity elicits trust from your clients, and trust from your clients begets more business. Here's how to market yourself as a pro.

BY JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY

There are the logos we can't mistake – the Starbucks mermaid, Nike's swoosh, Tiffany's blue box, McDonald's golden arches. These iconic enterprises have been perfectly branded as experts in coffee, athletic apparel, baubles and burgers. ▲ There are also the people who have successfully branded themselves as confident experts in their respective fields. Think Oprah, Donald Trump and Bono for starters. ▲ When it comes to success in sales, too, there's much to be said for standing out from the crowd. Here are proven ways seven of your peers are branding themselves as experts their clients can count on for all of their promotional needs.



Start a Video Series

Be a little off the wall.

When it comes to standing out among distributors, it helps to show a little spunk. Keith Wilson, account executive for PromoShop (asi/300446), launched a video series to show off products. The videos begin with Wilson singing a rap song: "I grant three

wishes 'cause I'm Promogenie. My competition's played out like Sergio Tacchini. If you're lookin' for the best and I'm not just in the West. Put me to the test, cause the genie never rests. I've been takin' care of clients for a decade and a half. Livin' off referrals, now you do the math."

Recently Wilson began doing his own "flip of the month" – he shoots a video of new products and sends it to his clients. "I'm doing something different to stand out. I stay fresh and differentiate myself by being in front of my clients and prospects," he says.

Wilson has found that the videos really resonate with his clients. "It's easy to delete e-mails and screen calls, but a video keeps them captivated," he says. And for someone who isn't very computer-savvy, he can still dress up in genie garb and do something ingenious as part of the video. "I go way out of the box so that I can touch someone around the world with one click," he says. Luckily, he's been able to make sales because of the video – he has had clients come to him because the video popped up in their e-mail and reminded them of something they needed to buy.

TAKEAWAY TIP

If you've decided to go on camera to provide regular, educational content, be unique. "You can't just pick an item out of a catalog. It has to be different," Wilson says. "You need to get to people and grow your business at every moment. You need to have some exclusivity so that the only place they can find the item in the video is with you." He, for one, likes to find the offbeat vendors and pitch their items that distributors can't find just anywhere.

Write a Book

Focus your experience.



At Custom Design Marketing Inc. (CDM, *asi/173073*), Bob Dawson decided to incorporate his knowledge of the incentive and recognition industry. Since he joined CDM almost three years ago, he has developed a proven method of demonstrating how incentive and recognition programs can show a true ROI.

Dawson started thinking about ways that he had been helping his clients grow sales, and he decided to write a thesis about getting a return on an incentive investment. He tied financials to incentive programs, and showed the final product to his appreciative clients. When others in the industry began approaching him about the work he published, he realized that there was an

opportunity to share the message about how he combined two careers.

Dawson met with a professional writer and explained the work he was doing. He collaborated with the writer and published *The Secret to Incentive Program Success: Incentive ROI That Makes Bean Counters Smile!* Over the years, he has also authored several other books about the industry and ROI.

Every time Dawson meets a new prospect, he is asked whether his strategies have worked for a company. "People like stories. They want to read something that sounds like it could work for their business," he says.

TAKEAWAY TIP

If you're ready to brand yourself by writing a book, make it as real as possible. "There are a lot of theory books that come out, but the author hasn't done what they are writing about," Dawson says. He advises against just interviewing different industry folks, and encourages potential authors to know what they are writing about. "If you've experienced it, write success stories, things that worked or didn't," he adds. He recommends that authors should offer solutions, not just point out what's wrong in a consulting role.

Specialize in a Niche

Trust in your creativity.

Many years ago, Rick Georges, president of Georges Communications Inc. (*asi/204609*), was in charge of the bachelor party for one of his best buddies. He created a T-shirt by hand with fun dares written on it that the bachelor had to complete on his "Last Night Out."

At the party, people asked where the shirt came from. Georges says, "Over the next few months a couple more friends, and friends of friends, got married and also threw bachelor and bachelorette parties. They asked me to create Last Night Out dare shirts for them too."

Georges realized quickly that there was a market for the Last Night Out shirts. He designed logos for the bachelor and bachelorette and started selling a few hundred of the shirts around Ohio. A handful of stores and bars purchased them – and kept reordering.

Then one day 10 years ago, Georges walked into a Spencer Gifts store and noticed that they sold bachelorette party supplies, and his wheels started turning. His initial promotion included mailing a bachelor and a bachelorette



Last Night Out shirt to Spencer Gifts. "They placed their first order for 3,600 shirts," he says. In the first three months he received reorders totaling more than \$80,000.

Georges saw the potential for the addition of other products then, too. He looked to industry suppliers for some ideas, including hanging shot glasses, glow badges, sashes and name tags. "Adding these new products through ASI suppliers helped grow my business, which started with just two T-shirts, to \$1.5 million in sales per year selling just bachelor and bachelorette products. I now sell to over 1,000 stores in addition to Spencer's 700-plus stores," he says.

TAKEAWAY TIP

If you're looking to specialize in a niche market, choose something new, fun and innovative, if that's appropriate. "Make it something that the customer wants to keep and use," says Georges. "You want your logo in front of them daily."

Outside the Box



Michael Cannon



Anthony Signorelli

Here, our outside sales experts offer their tips on specific ways to set yourself apart from the competition.

• Put your ideas out there.

According to Anthony Signorelli, founder of Signorelli & Associates Inc., a training, design and consulting firm, "The only way to be an expert and convince people of it is to have content in an area that you can speak and write about. People need to have a way to see what you're all about." He also recommends creating a profile on LinkedIn.

• **Determine your area of expertise.** "Find out who you are trying to talk to and be clear about that," Signorelli says. He recommends avoiding the temptation of being an expert in everything. "You have to brand yourself to a pretty specific market," he says. He advises focusing on one area and learning about how to communicate a focused message to a target audience.

• **Coauthor a book.** Michael Cannon, founder of Silver Bullet Group, has coauthored several books on sales and marketing. "Do it with an existing sales expert. There are a few companies out there that provide that type of service," he says. "All I had to do was write a 15- to 20-page chapter in the book. The publisher creates versions of the book so that each author gets their picture on the front cover." He encourages reps to hand out the books when prospecting so that they become branded an expert by association. "It's a great way to build brand recognition and establish credibility," he says.

• **Use case studies and testimonials.** According to Cannon, "If you say you're great, most people will be skeptical. If other people say you're great, the credibility factor is higher." He recommends including case studies and testimonials on your website. "Once you have them on your website, you can sprinkle testimonial quotes on every page," he adds.

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STAND OUT

Teach What You Know

Showcase your area of expertise.



Before she started her own company, Debbie Honig was buying promotional products in the corporate world. Through the companies she worked for, she could see that promotional products reinforced the business.

Now the president of Active Concepts Inc. (asi/104857), Honig started speaking more than a decade ago to college students and coaching organizations about how to put the buzz in their business. "When I started

lecturing at the Fashion Institute of Technology, I was teaching some classes there about how to promote and market their brand. I'd talk to many different types of students to explain the marketing aspect," she says.

Honig finds the benefit of teaching students is twofold. "Their eyes are wide open because they haven't been taught any of this. I come in and walk around the room and I'm coaching them on how to promote their business," she says. She mentions that the students start to see the world outside of textbooks. And most importantly, "I'm learning from them and they're learning from me," she adds.

After the class is over, Honig offers a free consultation for the students working on a project or a problem. "Sometimes, they turn me over to their bosses and then I ask if I can come in to make a presentation," she says. She's also started mentoring two distributors due to her speaking engagements. "The more you speak to a targeted audience, the more clear and focused you become on what your goals are," she adds.

TAKEAWAY TIP

If you want to teach what you know, reach out to your network. "I received two master's degrees from New York University and Baruch College, so I had a relationship with their human resources department," Honig says. "I let them know that if they needed a speaker, I would be available in marketing or mentoring." Through meeting people and networking, she was able to fill in for various speakers and then earn some teaching assignments.

Honig also recommends reaching out to related organizations and letting them know that you are looking to get into speaking. Prior to becoming a teacher, she had to work her way up with interviews and presentations.

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Become an Extension of Your Client's Department

Help them achieve their goals.



When the economy started to sputter last year, Noel Garcia, managing director at Boundless Network Inc. (*asi/143717*), sat down with his client to devise a plan to help them save money. He had been working with the client for eight years. Overall, their procurement department had a goal to reduce spending by \$30 million.

Garcia came up with a way to reduce their inventory requirements by 80%. He put together a presentation and showed his client different ways to save money, ranging from distribution and handling fees to inventory capacity. "The client had been carrying around \$150,000 to \$250,000 worth of inventory, so we were able to come up with a solution to reduce inventory down to \$30,000," he says. By working with the client to create the presentation, he was able to take the relationship to the next level.

He has always been a partner, but last year, Garcia really became an extension of the client's department. He even helped with international presentations to their management team. "The relationship has allowed me to have a lot more visibility into the account and the people who are involved. Salespeople face a challenge, being on the outside," he says. "We're on the same team. The relationship has created a lot more stickiness between us and the client."

Garcia's reward was a three-year exclusive contract, which should result in a threefold increase in business. "As they saw the value that I can provide as far as helping them achieve their objectives, it increased the trust in our relationship," he says.

TAKEAWAY TIP

To become an extension of your client's department, you need to learn to listen. "Talk business when the situation is right, but it's important to let your client do the talking. You'll find out what's important to them," Garcia says. By listening, he was able to find out where his client's focus was and dig deeper into that area. "I found out more about the opportunities that exist to make a small order bigger. If you talk all the time, you miss those opportunities," he says.

Garcia also notes that to become an extension of your client, "You have to get to know them and be comfortable. They need to share things with you. Then, you're not working against them to make money. They will feel that and open up," he says.

Special Service for Special Events

Assist with the details.



About 10 years ago, Paula Gossett, sales rep with Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*), started taking note of her regular, loyal clients and volunteered to work alongside them at their events, basically becoming a part of their team. She was already booking regular business with these clients, so she was focusing on providing added value and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Case in point: One client was having a very large event on the island of Oahu, HI. There were 1,000 attendees. Gossett provided several items for this event and had everything shipped

to the hotel. "I flew out and worked with the client for five, 12-hour days, getting everything set up, stuffing goodie bags, polishing awards, etc., and I did this at my own expense," she says.

"One item we provided was Aloha Shirts with the client's logo as part of the pattern of the fabric. ... totally custom job," Gossett says. "Since the shirts were done overseas it made sense to bring them in to the country through the Port of Honolulu instead of into L.A. and then shipping them back. The only hitch was to figure out who would receive the shirts, count them and store them until the

event."

Gossett located a large commercial laundry and contracted with them to receive the shirts, count, press, hang, bag them and deliver them to the hotel. The laundry even placed the shirts on a rack by size so that it was very easy for the hotel to do room drops.

"The client is still talking about this," Gossett says. The event is held annually and she does about \$250,000 in sales a year with them. She notes that helping at special events is also a way to meet other contacts within the company. "I have extremely loyal clients. The projects are never bid out," she says.

TAKEAWAY TIP

How can you follow in Gossett's footsteps? "Put yourself in your client's shoes and anticipate the things that they might need. Then do them," she says. "It's all about added value. Create the relationships and watch everything blossom from there." Also help them manage their time. "Anytime you can take something off of their plate, it's going to be very well-received," she says. "For example, if they're collating a large wearables order, you can offer to put all of that into a spreadsheet for them."

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Become a Public Speaker

Share what works.



For Mike Beckman, head of Proforma-BPM (*asi/300094*), giving presentations stemmed from a desire to share what was working for him. After Proforma asked him to share his knowledge at a national convention, he decided to hit the public-speaking circuit, because he enjoyed it so much. He earned a spot as a panelist for several education tracks at The ASI Show Orlando and will be giving three presentations at The ASI Show Chicago this month. Locally, Beckman offers his presentations to various chambers of commerce and business organizations. He recently spoke at the North Fulton Chamber and a local rotary club. “I enjoy sharing my insights into marketing so that others can possibly learn something that will expand their own business,” he says. “It’s also a great way to solidify my own personal thinking. Bringing business to myself is really an afterthought. My mindset is that if I provide a service to others, that service will come back to me in some shape or form.”

Beckman cites his public speaking engagements

when he speaks to customers and prospects. “I can literally tell people that I’m an industry expert because I speak on it and share my knowledge. I tell people that they can learn from an expert like me,” he says. After recently speaking at a local chamber of commerce, he also booked two jobs.

➔ **TAKEAWAY TIP**

According to Beckman, sharing is caring. “If you have something that sets you apart and it can benefit others, you should share it.” He recommends giving back as a way to brand yourself as a guru on the topic. “If it’s my idea to begin with, I know more about it. There’s no reason that the rest of the industry can’t benefit from that knowledge,” he says. He also recommends starting a blog: “We share our insights with our clients every day.” ▲

Jennifer Vishnevsky is a staff writer for Advantages.

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