

HOW CAN AN INVISIBLE SALESPERSON BECOME VISIBLE AGAIN

By Joe Heller

Do you remember a time when you were a kid and pretended to be invisible? Your imagination delighted your parents as you walked through the house inspiring them to play along with you. All could hear your innocent giggling. This was a positive for you because you thought you were able to alter reality.

Fast forward to today, entrepreneurs and sales professionals are still invisible. Only this time it's not pretend, it's real; and you're wondering why potential clients can't see you. Are you confused why someone else is getting all of the referrals or how a big deal lands effortlessly in the lap of your competitor? You feel like jumping up and down and screaming at the top of your lungs, "Hey, here I am!" You are trapped behind the "veil of visibility" being pulled down by the same vacuum that pulls sailors to their death as their ship sinks.

Invisibility for sales professionals is becoming more of a reality today than ever before. The world is more complex, more crowded, and more integrated than ever before. Competition is getting more rigorous; there are literally hundreds of suitors vying for the same opportunities in today's marketplace, whereby only a few decades ago, there were fewer and more timid competitors. Not only are there more competitors in the marketplace, but corporate America is increasing the noise, confusion, and mistrust with their stock manipulation, fraud, and mismanagement. Adding to the confusion is the new "law of the jungle." We no longer trust business to do the right thing; thus, the burden of integrity and responsibility has fallen to the individual instead of the company. Therefore, we have renewed our trust in the people to do the right thing,

which adds another dimension for salespeople to gain visibility in an already bloodthirsty marketplace.

With this in mind, let me dispel a common belief that many entrepreneurs and sales professionals have today--"build it, and they will come". The fallacy in these words is that it does not consider your ability and efforts to build a trusted relationship with your customers. Today the key to building a dynamic and thriving business, in this ever-evolving world, is building a foundation of trust--one person at a time. I've noticed in my travels that people have adopted a "so what" attitude. They are less concerned about the product/service features and advantages and are more concerned with individuals living up to their promises. People are doing business with people again, and they are saying, come and see me and please stop sending me those damn emails. I am not saying technology is bad; it does have its place. However, staying competitive and growing your business today means that you must break through the technology cloud and focus more on building strong personal relationships with your clients. It appears that technology is now controlling society instead of society controlling technology. Technology can also be useful in building personal relationships. For example the use of cell phones can be used to supplement the personal visits, since it also provides a dialogue between you and the client (unlike email or text messaging which tends to be a monologue.) Let's stop hiding behind emails or text messaging and speak to our clients whenever possible.

How can a salesperson gain control and break through your "veil of invisibility"? The secret lies in branding--not corporate branding--but

personal branding. A question I was recently asked during an interview with The Brand Channel was "...is it possible for a person to be a brand?" I answered no--not in the traditional sense of a brand. A personal brand is a metaphor for communicating your unique talents to your 'listening' market in such a way that they immediately understand the value you offer. A personal brand is about how to communicate the authenticity of your unique talents, your genius to the world. It's about earning the trust and respect of your market by establishing yourself as "the choice" and not "a choice" when someone has a need. Personal Branding is all about the quality of the communication you have with your "listening" market.

Note: A "listening market" goes beyond a target market. It is a market that is specifically listening for your unique value message based on their experiences, expectations and historical references. In other words, it's why one company chooses to use Intel and another chooses AMD. Each computer microchip has very little performance difference; the real difference lies in the minds of the buyers who are 'listening' for a specific benefit message. This is a subset of how branding works.

Just having a unique value is not enough. You cannot sit and wait expecting the world to discover your unique talents. In order to communicate your distinctive value to your listening market, consider a "visibility campaign". It's a way to communicate certain things, to certain people in a certain way that positions you to capture the attention of your internal market (firm/company) and/or your external market (clients/customers).

If you think you can be successful in sales while staying invisible, you are misleading yourself into the depths of mediocrity. If you wish to become visible again to your customers then you need to ask and answer the following questions to prepare your visibility campaign.

First steps: Ask yourself:

1) Do you have a FEAR of being visible to your

clients? Since being visible requires you to be dependable, reliable, and straightforward, there are those salespeople out there who do not have or do not want to have as part of their offering. It does require more effort and time to be dependable, reliable, and straightforward, and you need to make a conscious choice about your willingness to be the person required when you are visible to your customers.

2) Do you have a "visibility plan" that will build trust and credibility? If the answer is no, then you need to continue with the remaining questions. If the answer is yes, then you need to begin or continue to implement your visibility plan. Since trust and credibility take time to build, it is important to begin your campaign as soon as possible.

3) If you do not have a visibility plan, what is the first step you can take today to begin your quest for more visibility?

In order to create your visibility plan you must find the answers to the following five (5) questions.

1) What's your message? Remember--being unique is part of your new image so try not to use the same narrative that everyone else in your market uses. Be distinct, focus on the problems you have solved for your clients, and tie that into an emotional account from your client's perspective.

2) What media will be most effective? What are the experts in your field doing, where are they being published? This publishing helps build the trust and respect you need in your visibility campaign. Then you need to write an article on the focal issues your clients are facing today and offer your solutions.

3) What's your Brand Promise? Are you living up to the expectations the market has for you? Remember--you need to communicate with clarity to your market about your successes. You need to consistently educate as well as remind your market on how good you are.

4) Are you distinct? A catastrophic failing with many sales professionals is that they try to be all things to all people. When this happens, their brand gets diluted. Successful salespeople today are known for something, they've specialized. Use your specialization to define your offering to your listening market.

5) Do you have a story that can be easily told? Stories are viral and create buzz, hopping from one person to the next. Craft a story that's full of emotional facts of interest to the customer and provide a WIIFM (What's in it for me) to get people excited about what you do.

Hint: A speaker practices his or her story at least 50 times before going on stage. Make sure you 'own' your story before you tell it in public. So remember you can't stay invisible and expect to be successful! I challenge you to rise from the "Sea of Sameness," and be the best sales professional you can be. It takes time and effort but is worth it in the end.

In conclusion, by honestly asking and answering the questions above, you are on your way to changing from one of the multitudes of invisible salespeople to being one of a few visible sales people. This will allow you to be successful beyond your dreams. In order to be visible you need a plan, and you need to execute the plan. Being visible means that you are on the radar of the customer and must provide them value consistently.

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