

A Few Choice Marketing Secrets for Inventors
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What's the difference between a great idea and a great invention?

You can *sell* a great invention.

For many inventors, convincing investors and customers to buy the brainchild is a bigger challenge than creating it in the first place.

And it's no wonder. By one estimate, the average American sees 5,000 commercial messages a day. If anything, those are becoming louder and more "in your face." They are using approaches and content (like sex) that are off limits for many inventors. There is the ongoing drone of unhappy economic news. There are two wars. There are the daily stresses of surviving in a world that is changing more rapidly than anyone can digest. And there are catastrophes and crises: earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, local wars – to say nothing of watching a favorite team lose, listening to a spouse complain, confronting the car repair shop, and hunting for a kid's lost lunchbox.

Your target buyers and investors are distracted – like never before – by hundreds of events swirling all around them. You need something to compete with all of this. You need a few good, useful marketing secrets.

What are you selling?

The first secret is to understand what you're selling.

Actually, inventors can sell many different things – and some are more profitable than others. For example, some inventors sell "execution": they talk about what their invention *does*. They explain at great detail how it works. Their messages are full of features: smaller, lighter, faster, cheaper, hemi-powered, G4, multi-colored, flat-screened, automatic, hybrid, green and gluten-free.

Others sell "solutions." They offer the answer to the problems that people confront: a better way to lose weight, get rich, chop onions, surf the internet, stay in touch with mom, or get shirts whiter and brighter. Perhaps they can promise the restoration of lost youth, a pain-free foot corn removal or more miles per gallon.

The more effective marketers understand that the key is scratching an itch the buyer may not have known even existed. Those pros truly understand their key target buyers and they aim to delight their potential customers or investors by meeting often unknown needs. For example, who thought they needed an iPhone or a Facebook page?

At one time, people believed they needed CB radios and radar detectors, but few have them any more.

The most powerful approach, though, is to have a relationship with your customers at the strategic level. Imagine this: your invention's reputation among its most profitable buyers is that they think of it *first*, before anything else in its space. Usually, we associate this quality with strong brands. Think Mercedes, Ritz Hotels, Coca-Cola. But those are old, well established brands.

Within smaller niches, many products come to "own" their space among their fans relatively quickly. Look around your house or business. Are there "special" items that you prize because of their unique characteristics? How did you find out about it?

More Secrets: Identity, Target Donors, Messaging, Hooks

You probably were touched by good marketing. Great marketing differentiates the invention or the organization in the key buyers' minds. It positions the product or company in a unique way that makes it far more attractive than the competition. It answers the fundamental question: "Why you?" Why does the customer buy your product instead of somebody else's? Why does an investor decide to back you, rather than put his or her money in stocks, bonds, mutual funds, thoroughbreds, or collectible dinner plates?

At the most fundamental level, it's about what your product really *is*. Yet many investors assume their product identity is clear -- or they ignore it altogether. At the most sophisticated level, the buyer identifies with the product. That's why, for example, Porches can command bigger sticker prices than Fords.

And, speaking of target donors, does your marketing reach yours? Most marketers segregate their donors according to their attributes – age, gender, wealth, location, etc. Far more powerful is to consider under which circumstances your prospects are most likely to buy. For example, what are the attributes of people who buy bottled water? Do they tend to be male or female? Young or old? Rich or poor? Actually, they tend to be thirsty – and have a need for portable water. So, for water, it's all about circumstance, not attribute. That's why water (which is almost free from the tap) can sell for more than gasoline in some places.

Logically, the "message" behind the marketing is critical. Does yours sound different, fresh and exciting? Remember: new messages are everywhere. Over time, buyers will give less and less attention to old messages. Powerful marketing articulates clear, compelling messages that move donors – mentally and emotionally. Everything that you say or do should underline your key message.

Consider the recent Presidential debates. Senator Obama had a clear, oft-repeated message: we need change. No matter what was said, he hammered that single point home. Eventually, more than half of America agreed.

But the air is filled with compelling messages: what makes yours stick? The answer is a “sticky story” – that memorable “hook” that the customer doesn’t forget. Good marketing tells stories that the buyer not only remembers, but repeats – often. Think of the stories about great products or experiences that you like to tell – and that you never tire of telling.

Using these few simple secrets, you can build a powerful marketing strategy that captures the attention of investors and buyers in a noisy, distracting world.