

The Product of Your Product

“Hold on! Explain to me EXACTLY what’s wrong with my ads!”

The friend looked down at the ground and gave a heavy sigh. “Are you sure you want me to do that?” she said, looking up through the top of her sunglasses.

“You’ve been doing this advertising thing practically all your life,” the business owner said. “My ads aren’t working, and I bet you know why.”

“I think I have an idea,” she said, smiling and turning away.

The crowd cheered as the home team’s batter lined a single into left field. This was an odd place to do business, he thought, but maybe there was a method to her madness. She was, after all, one of the best consultants in the country in helping businesses turn their fortunes around. And he was in need of a turnaround.

“So what is it? What am I missing?”

She paused a few moments before she began. “Take a look around, Frank. Look at the people here in the crowd. Why do you suppose people come to this ballpark?”

He tilted his head and looked at her like he hadn’t quite heard her correctly. “What?”

“Look at everyone here. Take a good look.” She motioned with her hand from left to right to include the thousands of people seated in front of them. “Why are they here?”

He was visibly annoyed at her question, but decided to play along anyway. “I don’t know... I suppose to get away from the office for a few hours?”

“For a few of them, maybe. Look around. What else do you see?”

Directly in front of them was a father with his two sons, each probably about 10 years old. “OK, it looks like this guy’s here to get away with his kids for a day.”

“Good. What else?”

Not too far away was a group of teenage girls and boys from a suburban YMCA. “Those kids are here as part of a group activity or something.”

“OK. Keep looking.”

“Those guys down near the dugout look like they’re doing some casual business deal.” He was starting to get into this. “Those older ladies with the big hats are probably here just to get out of their apartment complex for a few hours. This old man over here with the scorecard and binoculars looks like he’s here for every game, so he’s a real fan.”

“Do you think all those people are here for the same reasons?”

“Well, no. They’re all here for different reasons. What’s your point?”

“My point is that baseball is a product, just like your product. The team sells tickets, but tickets are not actually what people buy. What people really buy is what the game means to them.”

She could see he was getting there.

“If the product is baseball, then the PRODUCT of that product is the experience of the game, and it’s different for everyone here. It could be a memorable time with family and friends... or a business relationship... or the sheer enjoyment of watching professionals play... or any of a hundred other things. It’s not the game itself. It’s the product of the game that people buy.”

His face began to change.

“I know why your ads aren’t working, Frank. You’re not telling people what the product of your product is. All you’re doing is telling them about you and what you carry, and that’s not enough. With all due respect, nobody cares about you. You must spell out what your product or service can do for them... the product of your product.”

“If you sell lawnmowers, can your mower cut a larger path so that the customer can be done mowing sooner? Can it sharpen itself so that you have less regular maintenance to worry about? Does it have a self-propel feature so that you can push it easier?”

“It isn’t enough to say, ‘This mower has a wide cutting path, self-propel and self-sharpen features.’ You must explain why it’s important to the lifestyle of the potential buyer, in ways that create desire, are easy for them to relate to, and that they can understand.”

“Advertise the PRODUCT of your product, Frank. Leave your ego at the door, and start thinking about what your customers really want.”

The crowd stood up around them and roared as a long fly ball sailed over the right field fence.

She watched the lightbulb go on in Frank’s mind, and she smiled. She knew she had hit a home run too.

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