

## To Win Customers, Stop Selling And Start Seducing

If you want to win over customers, stop selling and start seducing them instead. This was the underlying message of a talk I heard recently by behavioral economics professor and bestselling author [Dan Ariely](#). Ariely has mounds of data to prove that people have irrational tendencies. His studies and conclusions make it clear that most sales and marketing efforts get it wrong. A pointed, persuasive sales message is far less effective in winning customers than are sexier, subtler and smaller appeals.

Ariely has found that education, logical appeal, and reasons don't change people's attitudes and behaviors. Despite having clear goals and knowing the facts, most people will behave in ways that jeopardize their long-term best interests. This means brands need to stop making claims, touting technology, and pushing features, and instead start seeking an emotional connection.

Instead of thinking about *what* you want to sell, consider *how* you want people to feel. Even dull computer chips can seem sexier when sold not on processing speed but on the experiences they enable for people. Ask yourself, "What business are we really in?" You may be running a restaurant, but are you helping people bond as a community? You may be selling an insurance solution, but are you creating the next office hero? The more emotional your appeal, the more persuasive it is likely to be.

Ariely's research has shown that simply the way someone is asked a question can change their thinking. For example, asking people how often they floss can yield different self-assessments depending on whether they are asked to select an answer on a daily scale or on a monthly scale – if they answer of 1-2 on the former, it might lead them to conclude they don't floss enough, while a 1-2 answer on the latter might lead people to think they're ahead of most people.

### ADVERTISING

The implication for brands is to invite interaction from customers and engage in conversations with them. We already know that customer engagement makes people feel important and provides a way for us to collect valuable input and feedback. But Ariely reveals an additional benefit — the ability to ask questions that shape people's thinking to our advantage. By subtly raising points and anchoring perceptions, we can make people more interested in our brands. The simple flossing quiz described above could help a packaged goods brand sell more dental hygiene products or help a dentist get her patients to keep their appointments.

Ariely also presented evidence that environment matters, more than we think. Small cues, such as the placement of the salad bar in a cafeteria, for example, or whether fruit is piled high in a bowl or only rises to the rim, influences people's decision making. "We don't eat with our stomachs, we eat with our eyes," Ariely said as he explained the power of relativity cues in restaurant settings such as the size of plates and the order of items on a menu.

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Companies can tap into the power of environment to build their brands. Small details of the experience — including smells and sounds in a retail store, or colors and creative messages online — can be designed to express and deliver on brand attributes and values. Managers should identify customer touch points that have been overlooked or executed in the same way by everyone forever. By sweating the small stuff in the customer experience, brands can become more distinctive and memorable.

Great brands avoid selling products — they know it's far more effective to seduce people through emotion,

engagement, and experience than to push products on them.

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