

Marketing Lessons for Mental Health Professionals

(“Where’s the Remote Dad? I Need to Change the Channel.”)

“Would you like to watch Spiderman? It’s on TV right now.” I asked my son one Saturday morning.



“I don’t watch *THIS* Spiderman show dad,” he said as if I should’ve known better. “It’s boring. I saved a different Spiderman show on the DVR. It’s way cooler.”

In that moment, my six-year-old son unknowingly reminded me of the reality that is today’s marketplace. And that little reminder has BIG implications for our profession.

When I was my son’s age (*I swore I’d never use the “walking to school uphill in the snow” routine when I got older!*) I would have jumped in excitement at the site of any Spiderman cartoon. But there weren’t any available. Instead, I had to settle for Super Friends on Saturday mornings. And I waited every week to see that show! It didn’t matter what super hero was featured that week, or if it was a repeat. With three stations to choose from I was happy to watch whatever cartoon was put in front of me. Not so with my oldest son. He has choices, and a whole lot of them.

The result – he is a very discriminating consumer. Repeats? Please. That is so 1970’s! He has control over what he pays attention to and what he chooses to ignore. When my Super Friends show would cut to commercial I actually watched the commercials. There was no fast forward button on my remote because there was no remote!

My world, as a young boy, was one of scarcity. My son lives in a world of abundance and that fact affects how you advertise and how you build relevance in whatever business you are in today.

Make no mistake about it, my son’s multi-station, DVR, video on-demand world is also our world. And our profession works tirelessly to find its footing in a market where it is easy to be tuned-out.

If you're speaking the same old talk about the value of therapy you risk being ignored.

Understanding this market shift can help you build a much more effective marketing plan. Here are two tips that I believe should be a part of everyone's plan.

Tip One

First and foremost – be a part of the conversations taking place in your community and beyond. Limit the use of traditional advertising or, at the very least, work to integrate advertising into an overall grass roots marketing approach where you become an integral part of a community. People take notice when they hear someone's viewpoint versus seeing an advertisement about their services. They notice when a person practices what they preach, and they're more than happy to spread the word.

Tip Two

A second bit of advice is to avoid operating under a scarcity model. Sounds obvious but it's not easy. I see a lot of mental health organizations and individuals who hold onto this model. What's an example of a scarcity model in our profession? Here are two simple but common ones.

- Opening up a practice, placing an ad in the yellow pages, mailing brochures and waiting for the phone to ring.
- Posting your resume online, responding to posted job announcements and waiting for the phone to ring.

Having the best clinical expertise, the most innovative service or the best prices will not necessarily lead people to your door. Success rarely starts and ends from that premise. Are all of these important? Yes. But without consistent outreach your work will go largely unnoticed.

Factors for Success

Dedicate time to sales and marketing, and be genuine in your efforts. Use approaches that add value to people. Share your skills with others. Find a position that people can rally around because it truly matters to them.

If you cannot get your message across in a way that is engaging then you risk being just another Spiderman show that doesn't make the DVR playlist.

In my opinion, the three most important factors for success when going to market are:

- Your work ethic and your consistency with that effort.
- Your ability to offer a service that people value, believe in and talk about.
- Your ability to build strategic partnerships that add to your credibility, build trust and give you an entry point for clients to come to know you.

About the Author

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