



The SMMarT Guy

By Kim Robinson

Selfish Doesn't Sell

Years ago, I learned a new word when I was promoted from being in charge of just sales, to being in charge of sales *and* marketing for a huge region—*marcom*. My new boss at the time, the VP of the entire business unit, used the word frequently in our first meeting. Perhaps in response to the blank look on my face whenever he used the term, he told me it was short for *marketing communications*—direct mail, brochures, fliers, print ads—the works. He added that the creation and development of *quality* marcom was one of the primary tasks of my new position.

I received the promotion because the *quality* of my predecessor's marcom was poor. The phones didn't ring enough for us to hit our sales goals, so he left our company to "pursue other opportunities" with another. The method of my promotion told me I needed to produce better quality ads and direct mail pieces or I, too, would be released to "pursue other opportunities."

I examined everything created before my arrival and it all looked pretty good. Every piece clearly identified our products and services, and every piece had a call to action asking people to contact us. Our competitor's pieces looked about the same and they were doing well, so why didn't our marcom drive more calls? Why?

Then I saw it. Our brochures, direct mail pieces and ads primarily talked about our company. Everything was all about us. We didn't mention often enough how our products and services would specifically *benefit* the consumer. We were being selfish.

I am a sales guy, and I know that few sales happen if I don't focus on how the customer will benefit from owning what I sell. Selfish doesn't sell.

Our pieces were selfish because they

were all about us. Few sales were being made as a result.

I applied basic sales technique to the marcom equation and changed the direction of my (new) marketing team. We immediately began to treat each print ad, direct mail piece, brochure, and flier as if it were a face-to-face sale. We switched from telling people what we *had*, to telling people how what *we* had would benefit *them*. We quit being selfish.

It worked. Our hit rates went up and I was not forced to "pursue other opportunities" with another company. Life was good.

Selfish marcom is still the overwhelming favorite of both big and small groups, organizations, and companies because everyone just loves to talk about themselves. I often pick up brochures and fliers that are colorful and attractive, but clearly and *selfishly* focus only on what the company offers. WE PROUDLY OFFER could be the first three words to the selfish copywriter's national anthem. Follow-up stanzas could begin with phrases like, WE HAVE, OUR COMPANY, and OUR SERVICES.

Here's a major news bulletin—it's **not all about YOU!** No one, except perhaps your mother, really cares about what you do or what you offer. People only care about how what you do and offer affects *them*.

Here's another news bulletin: Because the majority of marcom is selfish, unselfish, *you-based* pieces that tell people how they will benefit by purchasing your product stand out like a bright light in a dark room. And it doesn't take a genius to understand that ads, direct mail, and brochures that stand out from the competition in a positive way make the phones ring, bring more people into your store, and drive more people to your web site.

A good local example of a non-selfish brochure in an industry dominated by

selfish, "look at us" marcom, is the one put out by Helland Construction. Instead of listing how they can remodel or construct a building, their brochure lists specific benefits of hiring the company to remodel or build you a new *home*. This piece of marcom resonates with buyers and Helland Construction is booked solid while many other construction companies are going under.

I challenge you to put your marcom to the selfish test. Take everything you have and lay it out on your conference table and circle every WE, US, OUR COMPANY, WE PROUDLY OFFER. Now, replace each of those terms with YOU or YOU WILL. The copy will understandably look rough, but you will begin to see the positive effect of changing from selfish to benefit-based copy.

Your mother may love knowing all about you and what you do, but customers do not. Customers want to know how what you do will benefit them. Structure all your marcom on the latter and you'll be more successful. Then, chances are your mother will love you even more. ■

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