

Positive Affirmation: Responsible Emotional Marketing

“Marketing” and “marketer” are words with negative connotations. Frankly, those connotations are well-deserved.

Marketers have been called out for years for distorting, misrepresenting, and flat-out lying about the products and services they’re trying to sell. In my mind, though, they’re also guilty of a worse crime: emotional manipulation.

Marketers prey upon the emotions of the unsuspecting. They exploit psychology by playing up people’s fears. They trick folks with slimy words and false insinuations.

That’s all true.

But there’s a different way to act, a different set of rules to follow. There’s a way that values honesty and helpfulness. There’s a set of rules that say, “Don’t prey, serve.”

StoryBrand is not the only marketing methodology that teaches its practitioners to be responsible citizens. I do believe, however, that its take on ethical marketing is extremely interesting, extremely illuminating, and extremely effective at selling.

You see, it really is all about emotions.

The Hero of the Day

By placing our customer at the center of the story, by making them the hero, we are both acknowledging reality and using emotions positively.

We’re saying, “We get it. In your life, you are the star of the show. Everything you see and do can only ever be perceived from that vantage point. In that, you’re no different than any other person.” And it’s true, we are all the heroes of our own stories.

The emotional aspect comes from that acknowledgement, that knowing nod. It comes from our willingness to place our company in a position to *help* rather than to *lead*, to *serve* rather than to *sell to*.

Success Story

In the StoryBrand framework, one of the key elements is “success”. In other words, what will the customer’s life look like when they use your product or service? This one is tricky, but it’s still done best when done positively.

It’s tricky because we might be tempted to show *too much* success, to paint a picture that’s unrealistic and takes advantage of a customer’s insecurities.

If we limit ourselves, however, to what I like to call “ordinary success”, we’ll be much more positive. Ordinary success is simply successfully overcoming one problem in life. The problem could be anything, even something mundane.

“My old car is embarrassing. I need a new one.”

“My stomach is rumbling. I need some food.”

“My lawn is overgrown. I need it to look better.”

These are everyday problems, and overcoming them is an *ordinary* part of life. But it still counts as success.

“You’ll have a new car, and you’ll love it.” As opposed to, “You’ll have a new car, and you’ll be much more attractive to potential mates.”

Keep it ordinary, keep it simple, but paint a picture of success.

Positive Affirmation

We buy things because we have a problem, a problem that thing proposes to solve. Just like food solves hunger, and investment advice solves worry about the future, we’re interested in a product or service’s ability to solve problems.

Positive affirmation is all about stating the problem, agreeing that it is a problem, and envisioning a world where that problem no longer plagues the customer.

Positive affirmation is strikingly different from emotional manipulation. Manipulation is all about trying to *create* a problem in the customer’s mind. It’s about using fear and paranoia to turn customers into unquestioning drones. It’s about short-circuiting folks’ psychology in order to take advantage of them.

Positive affirmation is none of those things.

It's all about acknowledgement, respect, and empathy. It's meant to be a gentle hand on the shoulder, not a hard shove on the back. It's not a tool, or a trick, or a disguise. Rather, it's a shared humanity. I believe it's the expression of one of human's greatest abilities: placing ourselves in the shoes of another.

Be Emotionally Responsible

Does your marketing fit under these definitions? Do you acknowledge emotions appropriately, without playing them up, or worse? Have you recognized the basic humanity of your customer, and laid out a realistic vision of a successful future?

If not, I'd ask you to reconsider the words you're using. Reconsider your tone, your implications, and your message.

Place yourself in the shoes of the customer, and think of what you would be grateful to hear.

In turn, your customer will be grateful to you.