

James Butler's Newsletter #43

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

March 2006

In the last issue we discussed the importance and benefits of knowing what your income is from an average customer – let us assume that you have now devised a strategy to increase that average moving forward!

As the idea for this issue's topic was coming together – something around maintaining your brand – a couple of news items have clearly demonstrated the importance of this. This week two professions, one of which I work closely with, have received negative publicity. So this month we will look at how a strong brand increases your resilience in such situations.

The brand – an overcoat for your business

When we discuss brand image at the Painless workshops, a key message is that your brand is what people see (both physically and in their head) when they encounter your business. The strength, or otherwise, of Vodafone's brand is that we all probably have some mental picture when we hear the name. In that sense, our brand is like an overcoat – the first layer of perception of our business. If we use that overcoat metaphor, what can we observe about brand?

An overcoat is seen from many angles: If our brand is what people see when they encounter our business, it becomes important to understand that everything we do could have an impact on people's perception of us. The Painless workshop on brand image recently came up with over thirty instances where our brand is experienced by customers and others – and please note they were far more than just a logo or overhead – they include how you answer the phone and what you wear. If we had given Hilary more time, her endearing competitiveness would have come up with far more, I am sure! As businesses, it is important that there is consistency across these 30 or more instances, to ensure the right brand image is conveyed.

Some will like our overcoat, others won't: We cannot have control over how people react to our brand – that is in their head, not ours. We can however, do our best to influence how they react by understanding what brand we want to convey, what will appeal to our market and ensure our overcoat is consistent. If we chop and change our coat, we may end up pleasing none of the people all the time, rather than some of the people most of the time!

A good coat can cover a number of sins: Ever popped to the shops with scruffy clothes covered by a nice long winter coat? A good brand can compensate for some minor transgressions – customers will be more tolerant if you have the right brand image and their loyalty (how else do some football clubs sell tickets each week?). Whilst we want to provide the best service every time, a strong brand can help us recover when we slip up.

Without your coat, you're exposed: Without that protection, icy winds or sudden storms can really ruin our day. In business, a strong brand, and the loyalty that often brings, can protect us from external influences that could be detrimental. This week the news is highlighting a report claiming that "there is little evidence that spinal manipulation is effective in the treatment of any medical condition." This would appear to knock dead any efforts by many of my clients to grow their osteopathy practices. But a strong brand is likely to ensure that patients will trust their practitioner more than an academic, and will continue to attend and refer others.

How good is your overcoat?

Weather the Storm

Last week, my wife and I visited the seaside and enjoyed a walk on the beach and around the harbour. We saw the fishermen landing their catch, and they were well wrapped up against the spray, the possible rain and definitely the cool wind. One of my clients recently described herself as being on the bow of a boat, being buffeted and splashed by the waves (She didn't mention whether Leonardo di Caprio was with her). If we draw together those two analogies, life is like being on that bow of a boat – it has a habit of throwing waves and weather at us every now and then. Having a fisherman's waterproof, or a strong overcoat, protects us in the moment.

With a good overcoat, we may not notice a shower: If the inclement conditions are minor, we may be so well protected we don't notice them. A good strong overcoat can help us focus on the task and not be worried by minor changes in what is going on around us. Negative publicity, drops in economic activity or a supply problem can pass almost without it affecting whether we achieve our goals.

A good overcoat protects our clothes from the worst: When the bad weather is more than just a shower, we need something reliable to protect our best clothes underneath. In business, we need a strong brand to prevent damaging conditions to affect our core. This week, the osteopaths with confidence in their clinical care, trust established with their patients and a strong practice brand will more easily deal with this adverse publicity.

[As an aside, why are the press so keen to run a story by someone (who has a clear agenda) that criticises a profession, but are less interested in the good news stories about the benefits of osteopathic care? They all say bad news sells, but I rarely meet someone who says that's what they want to hear. One of life's imponderables.]

The level of protection depends on the quality of your coat: Ever bought a bargain coat that had you soaked in the first shower? By working to maintain a strong brand, and investing appropriately, you can ensure that you have the right protection from a storm. There is a direct correlation between what you do to build and maintain the right brand and the protection and benefit it brings. Can you afford to leave it to chance?

Storms pass, but your overcoat lasts: As we stand on the bow of a boat being buffeted by the waves and storms of life, sometimes we do need to remember that calm comes after a storm, as well as before. In a few weeks osteopaths will still be treating patients, often using spinal manipulation, but the media will have moved onto another story. If you have a strong brand that allows you to weather a storm, you are then still there to take advantage of the calm to move forward.

How good is your ability to weather a storm, personally and professionally?

What can you do to improve the quality of your overcoat?

Painless Business News

Welcome to new clients and subscribers this month – the readership of this newsletter continues to grow steadily. Thanks (and keep it up!) to all those who take the time to forward my missives to fiends and colleagues – I appreciate your contribution. The new clients who have joined in the last month have also made this month my best yet. As a result of that growth, I will soon be joined by a number of associates in delivering the services Painless Business has to offer. That looks to be an exciting time with new opportunities, and represents an important step in the development of how we can serve our clients and maintain the brand. I'll keep you posted!

What has been particularly exciting over recent months is how my work with clients has expanded to include a range of different activities, beyond one-to-one support. Strategy Review Days help a business owner to focus on where they want their business to go, and what the key actions and challenges are in achieving that. Other clients have used my skills to help their teams work more closely together, with renewed purpose – improving productivity, retention and effectiveness.

A number of opportunities have arisen for me to speak to various groups and in the next few weeks I have plans to speak in Oxford, Milton, Abingdon, Faringdon, Surrey and Essex. Check the website for details of each of the events. It would be great to see some of you there!

Book Review

This month I have read *Profitable Dental Practice* by Philip Newsome and Chris Barrow. An interesting read (given that I don't run a dental practice!) because Chris and I trained at the same coaching school, and he does great work with the dental profession. Having written my own book for osteopaths in 2005 (and having a second book in gestation!) I enjoyed seeing how these two authors approached a similar profession.

I have always believed we can learn lessons from other professions or industries, in order to improve our own businesses, and whilst this has some quite dentist-specific sections, any business would do well to apply their 8 strategies.

My current book is *The Experience Economy* by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore. This is based on the principle that 'you are what you charge for' and that the future for business is providing experiences, not goods and services. I find this topic so fascinating, I am hosting a workshop on the subject in Oxford in May. Let me know if that would interest you.

Painless Puns

Some inspiring thoughts:

Any fool can paint a picture, but it takes a wise man to sell it.

Samuel Butler, quoted by Newsome and Barrow in their book.

There is no good in arguing with the inevitable. The only argument available with an east wind is to put on your overcoat.

James Russell Lowell

When I was young, my step father kept a range of amphibians and reptiles. I always thought that if I ever had a pet newt I'd call him Tiny. Why? Because he'd be my newt.

A client recently wanted to motivate their team, and asked what was the difference between ignorance and apathy. I replied "I don't know and I don't care."

Since the very first issue of this newsletter I have sought to provide humour within my monthly missive. I have also always sought to avoid offence and choose appropriate topics for those puns and jokes. It caused me great concern therefore, to receive an email from one reader who was offended last month (but thanks to her for sending it). If anyone else disliked last month's pun, I apologise unreservedly.

Final Words

Today is a gloriously sunny day and it is hard to think about using an overcoat – but that is rarely true for the protection our business needs – we need an overcoat all the time.

Setting a short amount of time aside to review how you create, maintain and protect your brand image could be the best thing you do for your business this week. If you would like help in working out what you need and want to do, give me a call.

Through a developing partnership with some trusted advisors, I am hoping to provide workshops and other opportunities on many issues around branding, design and marketing in the coming months. Watch this space!

Warmest regards

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James Butler helps business owners build the business they want. Through improving your strategic outlook and guiding you on sales, marketing and personal development he can provide renewed motivation and momentum in building your business.

Careful assessment of your needs ensures that the most appropriate intervention is supplied – whether one to one ongoing coaching, strategic reviews, training events or facilitated group exercises within a team.

To discuss how you can painlessly build the business you want, call James today for a no-obligation discussion of your situation.