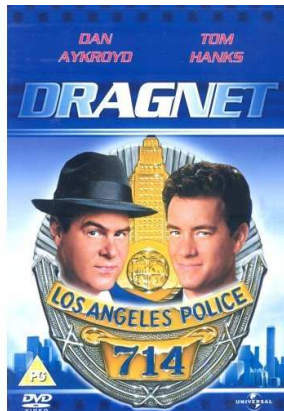


James Butler's Newsletter #82

Amuse, Inform and Inspire

June 2009

Whatever we know and whatever experience we have, there is always something new to learn, and that was certainly the case for me in recent weeks. Whilst it was on a statistical sample of one, the lesson was interesting (I'll explain more shortly). And as I pondered the message within it, I was reminded of *Dragnet*, the 1987 movie starring Tom Hanks and Dan Ackroyd.



Just the facts ma'am

The film was a parody of an American TV series of the 50s and 60s featuring Joe Friday, a hard working LA police detective. Dan Ackroyd played Joe Friday, a straight-laced, old-fashioned enforcement officer.

Whenever Friday and his partner Streebeck would interview a female witness, she would be portrayed as garrulous, speculative and gossipy. In riposte, Friday would utter (in an homage to the 50s TV series) "Just the facts ma'am".

(For an homage to the homage, look out for Bruce Willis saying "Just the fax ma'am" to a woman in Die Hard 2!)

"Just the facts ma'am" is an important message, and one that we would do well to remember in our marketing efforts (whether marketing our businesses, or ourselves in private life). Putting too much around the core message can obscure the meaning, detract from the point we were trying to make, or just cause people to switch off and not listen. Are you guilty of giving more than just the facts?

In late May I sent my regular newsletter to one of my subscription lists. In it I included the dates of some forthcoming training events I am organising. A few weeks later I sent the same subscribers a specific stand-alone message, just about the training event. I would estimate that the response in the second instance was at least ten times greater than when the message was buried amongst other information.

I work with many people who are looking to produce marketing communications for their clients or patients – what should they bear in mind, if they are to learn from Joe Friday?

Be clear on your purpose – if your intention is just to keep in touch with people (such as a regular newsletter), write with that in mind. If, however, you want to promote a new service, or a special offer, make sure that you get that point across.

Be concise – quality is better than quantity, especially for today's time-pressed audience. Don't burden yourself with writing a 16-page website when a 4-page one will achieve the same results (or close to the same results).

Be factual – "Just the facts" doesn't just mean miss out irrelevant stuff – it can also mean that the stuff you include must be true/factual. Far better to quote a fact like "8/10 patients get better in 3 weeks" in your communication than "I think this treatment could really help, honest".

Be appropriate for your audience – make sure the technicality of your language is appropriate for those who are reading what you write. If everyone on your mailing list has a keen interest in quantum physics, feel free to talk about Higgs' bosons and massless photons. If your readership is all teenage car mechanics, you may need a different approach.

As an aside, another interpretation of "Just the facts, ma'am" that has become apparent in recent weeks within my own experience relates to the difference between facts and interpretation. I have become acutely aware that two people can experience the same thing and have to very different realities regarding what happened. If you are forced to break one's own recollection down to just the facts, and remove our layers of interpretation, it can be very, very informative. An analogy that explains it well is that the thermometer in the room says it is a fact that it is currently 17 Celsius. My interpretation is that this is comfortable. Bev thinks it's cold. Same fact, different experience.

So, the next time you plan to communicate with your target market, how can you stick to just the facts, and make the message far more potent?

Painless Business News

On 11th June the Independent carried the front-page headline "The Recession Has Ended". The story was based on some recent economic data and some bullish predictions for recovery. My experience with businesses I work with is that the picture is still mixed – and that most of the issue now is a combination of access to finance, and buyer confidence. Whatever is happening for you, I hope you are able to react and strengthen your business, ready for the upturn.

I am happy to say that here at Painless Towers we are still in blissful denial about the recession, and continue to be busier than ever. Ann, Vicky and Celia, my associates, are working with more and more clients each month, and the door is always open for more enquiries! Hopefully this is a sign that I am getting the right facts in our marketing messages.

My other news this month is to advise of two opportunities that have come to my attention just recently. The first is *Train to Gain* which is a government-funded programme to provide training subsidy for small businesses. You have to employ 5 people or more, and there are a couple of hoops to jump through, but it is a reasonable sum of money to help you/your employees get some training. Two clients have used the money to fund my work with them and their business. Visit www.traintogain.gov.uk for more details.

The second opportunity comes from two local businesswomen who offer an excellent product to businesses in the hospitality sector (see thesilentcustomer.com). But to do that, they need the help of people like you and I, and are able to offer you the opportunity to have free meals in restaurants local to you. Yes, free meals in local restaurants. To access these, just visit <http://www.smart-survey.co.uk/v.asp?i=12863mwdnw> and complete their survey. Just remember me when you enjoy that free meal..

Book Review

This month I have been reading two books based on social science research and their application to modern marketing. The first, *The Hidden Persuaders* by Vance Packard, was originally published in 1957. Alongside being a fascinating social commentary on American business and life 50 years ago, it is still a very relevant book for business. Packard analyses the growing phenomenon (new in the 50s) of using psychological research to inform the marketing of goods. Part sinister, part applicable to business in the 21st century, it was a really interesting book.

A more modern book on the same lines is *Yes! 50 Secrets from the Science of Persuasion* by Goldstein, Martin and Cialdini. This is so interesting, I am tempted to share a few of their secrets each issue over the coming months. For example, Secret 1 relates the story of an advert on a home-shopping channel in the USA. By changing from the standard 'Operators are waiting, please call now' to 'If operators are busy, please call again' one company achieved a massive increase in sales. Why, when it would appear to the viewer that making a purchase is going to be harder work? Well, you'll have to read the book for the detail (or call me – call again if lines are busy!), but the theoretical principle behind the results is known as social proof.

Painless Puns

Wimbledon is underway here in the UK, and I shall resist any "Go Murray" quotes until after he has won, but I like this quote from John McEnroe, in the trailer for the BBC's coverage:

The toughest game of all is against yourself.

After some experience recently of people taking the same words and creating different meaning, this quote appealed:

Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs.
Pearl Strachan Hurd.

Thanks to my nephew Alex for these two puns – from his FHM magazine:

To spice up life in the bedroom, my wife went on top last night. I love bunk beds!!

And

Hear about the explosion at a pie factory? It killed 3.14159 people.

(Those were the clean ones!)

Final Words

Too often we can feel the need to dress up our message in too many words – perhaps to seem credible, perhaps through nervousness, perhaps because we have misread the needs of our audience. Sticking to the facts and keeping it simple can help us get our message across and engage our customers. Need I say more?

Warmest regards

James Butler

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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.