

Nailing the Invisible Interview

By Justin Locke

March 15, 2011

Advisor Perspectives welcomes guest contributions. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of Advisor Perspectives.

I am always looking for a marketing edge, employing everything from social media to traditional collateral. But the other day I saw marketing from the other side. Someone acquired *me* as a new client, and it was revealing to learn why.

The story begins with some disappointing news from my dentist, and it ends with a complete rethink of my online marketing strategy.

I have had the same fabulous dentist for the past 20 years. Unfortunately, she is retiring. I was very happy with her, but now I have to find somebody new.

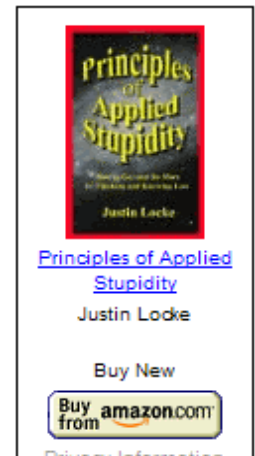
At this point, I did not Google “dentists,” nor did I look in the yellow pages or walk down the street looking for a big neon tooth in the window. Instead, I asked 500 of my Facebook friends: “Anyone have a fab dentist?”

I got a few lukewarm, courtesy, “trying-to-be-helpful” responses with names and phone numbers, but one person responded with major enthusiasm. “I have a fantastic dentist,” she said. “I love her. So will you.”

I called my friend and – no exaggeration – grilled her for 20 minutes about her dentist. I covered everything, including her location, the convenience of parking nearby, her fee structures, whether she wears too much perfume, even “does she have decent magazines in the waiting room?”

I was gradually convinced that this was not a veiled attempt to drum up business for some second-rate in-law. This new dentist was indeed worthy of further consideration. As soon as I hung up, I called and made an appointment.

My new dentist has no idea how I found her. The phone just rang and here I was, a total stranger giving her new business. She may have a fancy website, ads in the paper, and a nice sign out front, but the real reason she acquired a now-til-the-end-of-time client (as I tend to be) is because she passed the “invisible interview” test.





Invisible interviews are not unusual. I have been using this approach for years – it’s how I found my original dentist as well – and it’s how I hire everyone. Earlier in my career, I was a music producer. In those days, when I hired musicians for recording sessions, I never auditioned anybody. Instead, it was all via invisible interviews. I would call colleagues who I trusted and asked them for names, and I would grill them at length about anyone they recommended. I would hire entire orchestras this way.

Invisible interviews are not only how I hire people, it is how I get hired. As I look back, virtually every client that I have ever gotten came via a third-party invisible interview. Someone – a past client, an acquaintance, or even a total stranger who just knew of me – was asked by one of their friends or colleagues, “Can you recommend a good public speaker?” I rarely do any direct selling, as it seems like most people who call me have already decided to hire me. They already got the sales pitch and did the interview through someone else.

Even though I have never witnessed any of it, I thank everyone who has given me a good initial sales pitch or a convincing follow-up interview.

Knowing the power of invisible interviews, I have rethought my website, blog, and how I market myself digitally. While much of what I had been doing was originally designed to attract and sell “walk-ins,” I now use my web marketing to serve as a reinforcement of invisible interviews. Serious buyers have already interviewed someone about me. There is already a 90% preexisting decision to buy, so the website should have a lot less introductory information, and a lot less “push.”

To illustrate, imagine someone deciding to buy their first widescreen TV. If they’re serious about making the purchase, they’ll have already done research before they ever get to the store. If the salesperson inundates them with too many new options and choices, the decision to buy will get muddled up.

I am trying to avoid the same mistake with my website and blog. Hiring a keynote speaker or a financial advisor is an important choice, not an impulse buy, so chances are the best prospects have already learned about you. One’s web content should reflect that fact. Instead of the usual generic sales pitch, I now think in terms of thanking visitors for considering me and welcoming them to my client family. I need to acknowledge that a personal connection already exists, because someone they know recommended me. In making the initial connection, that is far more important than any listing of “features and benefits.”

It’s the tone that matters, and the overall message of your web site should reinforce that personal connection. There is a subtle but very important difference between speaking to someone who is just browsing, and reinforcing a connection with someone who feels that they know you and is pretty much already committed to buy. These serious buyers need to be welcomed, not sold.



Justin Locke is a speaker based in Boston. He spent 18 seasons playing the bass with the Boston Pops, and he is the author of several books, including "Real Men Don't Rehearse" (a musical memoir) and "Principles of Applied Stupidity," a look at how to be more productive and effective by going against the conventional wisdom. See more by visiting his website at www.justinlocke.com.

www.advisorperspectives.com

For a free subscription to the Advisor Perspectives newsletter, visit:
<http://www.advisorperspectives.com/subscribers/subscribe.php>