

How to get your brand inside that exclusive club available only to the market leaders

In the town of Montclair, New Jersey, where I live and work, we have a trendy and exclusive nightclub called *Diva*. It resembles something you might find across the river in the Big Apple and, just like they do over there in Manhattan, every Friday and Saturday night, a bunch of hopefuls line up outside behind a velvet rope, waiting for their chance for acceptance. Some of the crowd—regulars and a few who look especially attractive—get to cut the line and are ushered right in to the inner circle, while others often wait for hours—or just don't get in at all.

It kind of parallels what happens when we try to get new customers, doesn't it? Some of our competitors—regulars and a few who look especially attractive—get to cut the line and go right in, while some of us wait for what seems like years for just an appointment—or just don't get in at all.

So what's the secret of getting into the club? Why do they only pick the regulars and those who look especially attractive? Even more importantly, how do you become one of them?

The answer lies in finding a way to gain acceptance into your prospect's own hip and exclusive establishment called the "Inner Circle of Choices Club."

The *Inner Circle of Choices* is a private and exclusive club that each and every one of us has, and is unique to our own values, tastes, and preferences. Think of it as an imaginary hangout for representatives from all of the choices in your personal and private world. Included are your choices for friends, where and how you choose to live, what you choose to wear, which team you choose to root for, and—as it relates to brands—which ones you choose to buy and where you choose to buy them. Products and services that are included in your personal inner circle are intimate friends with bonds that keep you loyal to them. Like your family, these are not just casual relationships but trusted allies that play a pivotal role in your support system.

Your goal for growing your brand is to have it become a valuable and welcomed regular guest at your prospect's circle of choices club. But there are a few things you need to understand about his club before you can even come close to realizing this goal...

a. The *Inner Circle of Choices Club* is the basis for all repeat business.

Think about your own inner circle. Isn't it true that there are products, services, and brands that you always choose over and over again? Oh sure, on occasion you might be seduced into straying and trying something new, but you always come back, because the things in your circle are special to you.

b. Admission to the club is by invitation only.

Within the circle are only those items that we choose to have there—we decide who gets in and who doesn't. The relationships we have with those in our club are only with things we feel attracted to. Speaking of attraction, here's an important lesson to remember, and remember well...

*Attraction happens when we become attractive,
and never happens when we come on too strong!*

c. You are not in the prospect's club, and your competitors are.

It's a tough pill to swallow, but realize that this is why so many of the marketing and selling messages we're exposed to every day are completely ignored. You have to appreciate the futility of saying (through marketing and advertising messages): "Don't buy that product or service that's in your inner circle, a trusted member of your club that you value and know so well. Buy from me instead, a total stranger that you're suspicious of and know very little about!"

d. At least five bouncers are standing in your way.

Just like at *Diva*, a bunch of tough-looking goons keep guard outside to block your entry into your prospect's club. These very specific areas of resistance—key characteristics of the human psyche—need to be addressed and overcome if you are to gain any access at all. But if by some technique (and of course there are techniques) you can neutralize these gatekeeper's powers, it is quite possible to get inside and enjoy all the riches that abound. We have identified five key areas to focus on that are so fundamental that they can be regarded as universal—crossing all cultures, age groups, religions, and social classes. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for your brand's success...

Bouncer #1. Selectivity. To make sense of our world and decide how to relate to it, people need to classify and pigeonhole people, things, places, etc. If you're to gain access, you must convey meaning for your product or service that is beyond that of simply an industry participant.

Bouncer #2. Connectivity. Probably the most important thing in a person's life at any given moment is the way he feels. To get in his club, you need to find a way to connect with him on an emotional – *feeling* level.

Bouncer #3. Self-Interest. The primary motivator of human activity is self-interest. Find a way to tell the prospect how his self-interests will best be served by letting you into his *Inner Circle*, possibly at the expense of one of his valued friends.

Bouncer #4. Recall. People's short-term memory is extremely volatile and evaporates quickly. You must provide a good way to help people remember and recall your brand when they're ready to make a purchasing decision.

Bouncer #5. Resentment. People have an underlying resentment towards salesmanship, marketing, and advertising and see it as an intrusion on their privacy. You need to find a way to overcome this resentment and connect with people in a way they find both appealing and engaging.

*It's just that...
you need to connect in order to succeed...
but the customer doesn't want to know
about you, and has already tuned you out...
and entry into his club is by invitation only...
and you can't force your way in the door...
and he has his goons trained to stop all
of your sales efforts...
and you need to get inside because that's
where the profits are...
and you need those profits to grow
as a brand, etc., etc....*

Ok, Ok, Ok! There's a way to get into the Club.

(Why would I write this if there weren't?) But it requires that you must do certain things in a certain way, every single time. In other words—you'll need a good system.

So here's an abridged version outlining the basics of the system we employ...

1. Develop a clear identity. Employ good market research to find out just what your identity is in the eyes of your best customers. What's the value of your service or product—not from your perspective, but from theirs? Use what you learn to distinguish yourself from your competition in a meaningful way. Your brand's identity must be built on a platform that sets you apart from everyone else (on purpose!). The prospect is going to pigeonhole you. Just how would you like him to do it?

2. Offer a benefit. What's in it for him to let you in his club? Your product or service is going to solve a problem (perhaps one he doesn't even know he has) and he's going to enjoy the results. Your premise must be built on a great benefit that the prospect can easily understand and relate to.

3. Appeal to his emotions. How do you want the prospect to feel after listening to what you have to say? Align your creative marketing techniques with your desired emotional response.

4. Help him recall your name. Employ a unique device to help him recall who you are when he's ready to purchase what you're offering. A unique graphic, a turn of phrase, a combination of the two—just make sure it's meaningful and identifiable with your company and reminds him of the benefits you have to offer.

5. Penetrate his “noise” barrier. Find out how to penetrate his resentment and resistance to sales. He's developed a “noise” barrier to filter out all but what's pertinent to his life and values. You are an annoyance and he will tune you out unless you're offering some interesting information that he can use.

6. Be all that you say you are.. and more. *Be absolutely delightful!* Deliver an experience that he'll want to go back for. Make sure that the claims you make and the promises you offer are supportable and sustainable, or change your products and services to support the promise. Then throw in a free prize that will make them happy they chose you instead.

The secret to making all of this work lies in your ability to distill this information down to a brilliant essence that comes across as being very simple and clear, but still neutralizes the imposing barriers standing in your way to admission to the club. The answer may not come too easy, but with a good system in place, the answer will come, and more and more customers will extend the invitation for you to join them in their *Inner Circle of Choices Club*—a very great honor indeed.

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