

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Everybody offers benefits in their marketing, but guerrillas stress those benefits that only they offer. That's where to hang your marketing hat.

Many of today's products and services are so similar to each other that the only difference is in their marketing. They try to woo new customers with jingles, special effects, gimmicks, freebies, sales and fancy production.

These marketing devices are the final refuge of people with limited imaginations. Although there is little question that they can help, a serious guerrilla knows there are other marketing weapons with far more potency.

The most important of these people are competitive advantages. If your widget doubles a company's profits, grows hair on bald heads, or attracts life-long partners, you don't have to stoop to using gimmicks. Jingles will just get in the way of clarity. Just the truth will do very nicely, thank you.

Perhaps you have a plethora of competitive advantages. The only ones that can be translated into instant profits for your company are the marketable ones. A new kind of fabricating material, unless it is a dramatic advancement with dazzling benefits, will probably only bore your prospects.

The idea is to identify your marketable competitive advantages, then concentrate heavily upon those. If you don't have any marketable competitive advantages, realize that a savvy guerrilla discovers them or creates them.

The area most fertile for creating a new competitive advantage is service. There are gobs of automobile detailers in my area. All of them charge about the same price, do about the same job. But why did I pick P? Class Details to detail my car? Because they make house calls.

I didn't have to waste one second of my precious time attending to the details of detailing. Instead, I made a phone call and P? took over from there. I was impressed by their competitive advantage -- though they didn't even mention that advantage when they started in business. Reason: they didn't offer it then. But they surveyed the competitive scene, then invented it and advertised it. That's exactly what I'm recommending to you.

See what your competitors are offering. Patronize them if you can. Keep an eagle eye for areas in which you can surpass them, especially in service. Perhaps you can offer faster delivery, on-site service, gift wrapping, more frequent follow-up, maintenance for a period of time, installation, a longer guarantee, training, shipping, the possibilities are virtually endless.

A customer questionnaire will turn up many nifty areas upon which you may concentrate. Ask why people patronize the businesses they do. Ask what the ideal business would offer. Ask what they like best about your company. Pay close attention to the answers because some might be pointing directly at the competitive advantages you might want to offer.

Does it cost much to offer a competitive advantage? Nope. It takes brainpower, time, energy and imagination, but it is not a matter of money. And is precisely why guerrillas score so many bullseyes -- using the brute force of a brilliant competitive edge to negate the need for a huge budget.

It may be that you already have a competitive advantage that is not yet marketed as such. Back in the thirties, a copywriter went for a tour of the Lucky Strike cigarette factory. When he came across a large warm room filled with tobacco, he asked the person giving the tour what that was all about. "Oh, that's our toasting room," said the tour leader. "Do all cigarette companies have toasting rooms?" asked the canny copywriter. "Sure, they all do," was the answer.

But nobody else was marketing them. The writer suggested that Luckies say "It's toasted!" right on the front of the package. The marketing director complied and soon, the brand became America's number one seller -- emphasizing a competitive advantage not recognized as such by their competition.

Such stories are legion. The important thing for you to do is to identify or create your own, then let it propel you to victory.

To begin to find your competitive advantage, make a list of the benefits you offer. Of those benefits, many are being offered by your competition as well. But which do you offer and they do not offer? Those are your edges. Which of those are most important to your prospects? Once you have identified those competitive advantages, you've got a ticket to ride -- all the way to the bank.