

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Every guerrilla knows that the number one factor influencing purchase decisions is confidence. The road to confidence is paved with credibility.

Having the lowest price won't help you much if your prospect doesn't trust you in the first place. Offering the widest selection and the most convenience won't aid your cause if your prospect thinks you're a crook.

You've got to face up to the glaring reality that prospects won't call your toll-free number, access your website, mail your coupon, come into your store, visit your trade show booth, talk to your sales rep, talk to you on the phone, or even accept your generous freebie if they aren't confident in your company.

Time zips on by. Your prospects can't afford to waste it or their money with companies that haven't earned their confidence. In order to earn that confidence -- no stroll in the park, as you've most likely learned -- you've got to use specific guerrilla marketing weapons and use them properly. I emphasize "properly" because even a smart bomb isn't a valuable weapon if it lands on your foot.

Guerrillas think in terms of getting down to the business of achieving and deserving credibility. All their marketing materials, whatever they say or show with their main message, also carry a "meta-message" -- an unstated, yet powerful communicate' to prospects.

The meta-message for Deuce Cleaners of a superbly written direct mail letter on very inexpensive stationery is going to be quite different from the meta-message of the same letter for Ace Cleaners on costly stationery that looks and feels exquisite.

The paper stock carries a strong meta-message. So does the real or metered stamp. The typeface speaks volumes and the printed -- or handwritten -- signature is even more eloquent. The Ace Cleaners letter has superb stock, a clear and elegant typeface and a hand-signed signature, using blue ink and a fountain pen. These are tiny details. Tiny but nuclear-powered.

Not surprisingly, the Deuce Cleaners letter, even though worded exactly like the Ace Cleaners letter, will not draw as healthy a response because of its weak meta-message. A powerful meta-message inspires confidence.

Entire marketing plans fall by the wayside because inattention to seemingly unimportant details undermines the prospect's confidence -- even if that confidence was earned elsewhere.

An amateurish logo makes your company seem like an amateur. Any hint of amateurism in your marketing indicates to your prospects the potential for amateurism elsewhere in your

company -- throughout your company.

Does this mean that cheap stationery, a plain Jane website, fuzzy type, and poor English destroy your credibility? Not entirely. But shabbiness in these areas certainly do not contribute to your credibility.

Absolutely everything you do that is called marketing influences your credibility. The influence will be positive or negative, depending upon your taste, intelligence, sensitivity, and awareness of this power.

Be aware of it the moment you start operating your business, and if not then, right now. Begin the quest with the name of your company, your logo, your theme line, location, stationery, business card, package, brochure, business forms, interior decor, website, fusion marketing partners, even the attire worn by you and your people.

Communicate even more credibility with the building you're in, the people you employ, the technology you use, the follow-up in which you engage, the attention you pay to customers, the testimonials you display, your trade show booth, your signs, and surely the neatness of your premises.

The way your phones are answered can gain or lose credibility for you. Just yesterday, I decided not to make an expensive purchase from a store I had called simply because they put me on telephone hold for too long. Minor detail? Maybe, but somebody else now has my deposit check.

You gain credibility with your advertisements, listings in directories, columns and articles you write, and talks you give. You gain it with your newsletter. You gain even more by your support of a noble cause such as the environment. All these little things add up to something called your reputation.

The most important word in marketing -- commitment -- is something that also fuels your credibility. When people see that you are maintaining consistency in your marketing, they'll assume you're just as committed to quality and service.

All of your weapons must communicate the same meta-message -- one that fits in with everything else in your marketing and with the reality of your offerings. You don't need a Lincoln Continental identity to succeed with a bait shop.

Credibility is not automatic but it is do-able. Give a seminar. Work hard for a community organization. Nudge customers into referring your business. Word-of-mouth is omnipotent in the credibility quest. The idea is for you to establish your expertise, your authority, your integrity, your conscientiousness, your professionalism, and therefore -- your credibility.

When that PR person gets you into the newspaper, make reprints of the article and frame them, include them on your website, into your brochure, pop them into your newsletter, put them on your counter, stick them in your store window. Cost? A bit of time. Result? A lot of

credibility.

Trade shows can enhance your credibility and so can free demonstrations. Free consultations can do wonders for it and so can free samples. Do glitz and glamour enhance your credibility? They do --- but be careful that you don't send out the wrong message. If you're a discounteer, glitz can sabotage your identity.

Wanna shortcut to credibility? Run a full-page ad in a regional edition of a national magazine. Just running the ad won't net much credibility for you, but the reprints you display, mail, incorporate into other marketing, and proudly disseminate will. They'll all proclaim "As advertised in Time magazine." And if they don't say, Time, they'll say some other prestigious publication.

All the credibility that millions of readers attach to the magazine -- they suddenly attach to you. I'm not talking zillions of dollars here. I'm talking of a few thousand -- and just one time. It's a small price to pay for credibility. You can get details about incredibly low costs for incredibly credible magazines by getting the free media kit from Media Networks, Inc. at 1-800-225-3457.