

How to Make Yourself Different

If you understand the need to be different in your marketing, the critical question becomes: “How can I be different?” Many nonprofits and businesses have competing or similar organizations in their area. On the surface, it seems like most organizations of similar purpose are for the most part identical. Churches seem the same. Builders, car repair shops, dry cleaners, charity thrift stores all seem generally the same. One of the biggest struggles that business and nonprofit owners have is identifying how they can be different from their competitors.

There are hundreds of ways that these organizations can separate themselves from the pack, but here are the six ways we find to be the most successful.

1. Cost – Let’s start with the easiest first. In our increasingly global economy, especially in the product industry, price is “king.” Most products are becoming more like commodities where a few dollars in saving will make a huge difference. Finding a new way to create a product or service that can match current quality but be a few cents cheaper can sometimes lead to explosive growth. Charities which track the cost per client they serve are increasingly seeing people use these online figures to determine their giving commitments. In a poor economy there is also increasing attention to organizations that present the customer or donor with better financial opportunities.

Key Question: What can you do to reduce cost?

2. Quality of Service – The difference model for quality of service is almost the exact opposite approach to cost. The quality of the product, service

or experience is so great that it compels people to purchase or work with you. Think “status symbol.” People will pay more for cars, homes, appliances, club memberships and box seats — all because the name and quality of the experience is superior

to the competitors. When you eat at a country club they remember your name even if you visit just a few times a month. By comparison, at my local sandwich shop where I have eaten weekly for three years, I have finally worked my way up to getting a head nod and a “How’s it going?” from the manager. We love the extra attention and quality that status products or services give us. For example, nonprofits have “VIP events” with small groups

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of important volunteers or donors where they get to meet organizational heads and other dignitaries.

Key Question: What can you do to make your customer's experience feel private or exceptional?

3. Accessories – By accessories I mean additions or changes to what is normal that significantly alter the item, service or experience. For instance, my mother, a library administrator, was involved in building a new library. Included in the plan was a food and coffee bar that not only generated money, but also was very different from the “no food allowed” policy of most university libraries of that time. The one thing you see with successful accessories is that over time they become expected. Power car windows in their early days were accessories that only the best cars had. Now, they are common place. A friend of mine bought an old restored car. When he showed the car to his grandkids, they pointed to a manual window handle and wanted to know what it was.

Key Question: What feature can you add or what unwritten rule can you break that will make your product or service stand-out?



4. Time Savings – This way of being different excites people, because many people are under great stress due to increasingly tight schedules. Nonprofits are getting more creative in how they utilize volunteers. One example is the “shoe box ministries” where people fill shoe boxes that go to other countries for those in need such as children and military personnel. These types of ministries have grown, especially at Christmas, while other more labor intensive ministries have shrunk. Likewise at Christmas time, online gift buying has replaced going to the store for many people. Time convenience as well as cost has driven this. My local dry cleaner now picks up and drops off at my house. I avoid certain stores that I know always have long lines.

Key Question: How can you save your customers time?

5. Ease of Use – This can sometimes be a subset of “Time Savings.” Ease of use finds a way to take something that is time consuming and complicated and makes it an easier experience. Think “drive thru.” Drive thru allow you to do your shopping without ever leaving your car. Ease of use can even be in the packaging (pop-up tops, handles on containers, etc.). The trick is to find things that people either do not like to do or that takes them a lot of time and find a way to make it easier. I have had two payroll services over the years. The first one was constantly sending me complicated paperwork that I did not understand and required me to do a fair amount of work myself. The second company, with which I have done business for over five years, has me fill out only one sheet that has the employee hours on it. They prepare all the paperwork and on more complicated items either give me step-by-step instructions or call me with their questions. They were different by making the process easier for me.

Key Question: How can you make things easier for your customers?

6. Scarcity – This is the hardest of the six to identify and utilize, but it is the financial “mother lode” of being different. This is where you have a product, business, nonprofit or church, and you are the only game in town. This gives you a virtual monopoly; and, for as long as it lasts, offers huge upsides. For instance, a few years ago I was looking for a “countdown clock” (a clock that can be programed for a specific day and time in the future and the clock counts down from that time). I did some research and surfed the Internet. After hours of looking, I finally found one company that sold a small plastic desk countdown clock. It was over priced, and I had to pay shipping. I paid for it anyway and since then I have ordered them for others. I had nowhere else to turn and so I spent my money with the only option I had. Niche markets or associations are other examples. Sometimes a nonprofit or business can have scarcity working for them in a rural community such as being the only restaurant within 20 miles.

Key Question: Can you offer something where you are the only game in town?

These are six key ways that your organization can be different (cost, quality of service, accessories, time savings, ease of use, and scarcity). Before you can have a successful brand or see dramatic growth, you have to find and articulate how you can be different. Nehemiah Communications can help you do this.