



Using NLP to differentiate yourself in a challenging market

By Lindsey Agness

In times of recession, it's a challenge to find ways to make ourselves stand out in the crowd and be awarded that rare project. When Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed NLP they wanted to discover what made the difference between good and great behaviour. They worked this out by modelling many world-class individuals across many different fields. They discovered what the individuals believed about themselves, what they did and how they did it. The result was a set of tools and techniques that assist people to stand out in the crowd.

I've been teaching these techniques and using them in business over the last 12 years. I used these techniques myself as I made some big changes in my career since turning 40. I've left a successful business consulting career with one of the top global consultancies, set up my own business and became a best-selling author. I've been through the experience of having to build a brand that's about me and differentiating myself in the market place. Here are some tips from what I've learnt through using NLP on myself.

Personally, I'm having my best year yet!

Build amazing rapport with your clients

Invest time in developing longterm relationships with clients. Find out what you can about their interests and hobbies both inside and outside of work. Find new connections with them and consider how you can add more value to them. Keep in contact as it costs so much less to find new clients from your old client

database. For example, send them articles that you know they will be interested in – it costs nothing other than a few moments of your time. In meetings, find opportunities to match their body language and the pace and volume of their voice tonality. Find areas of common ground without fabricating any information. Notice what happens.

Set stretching goals

It's been proven that the most successful business people have goals. Take a few minutes to consider what are your goals for the next year in terms of your career. They can be small goals to big goals. It doesn't matter so long as you have some! Personally though I'm a pretty greedy person so I tend to go as big as possible. List out your goals and make sure that they are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed). Commit your goals to paper and put them on the wall where you can see them easily. Having goals will help you become more focused with your clients too as you'll know exactly what you're going for. This will help you stand out from the others who don't have clear goals!

Really take responsibility for what you want to create

One of the things that makes the biggest difference is to REALLY take 100% personal responsibility for your goals and your results. Yes, that does mean getting rid of the excuses or blaming others for your lack of effort. To the extent that you are prepared to do that you probably won't have to...at

least that's how I've experienced it. In contrast, when I've relied on others that's when things haven't gone to plan – though I've always had someone to blame! What's the first step you need to take to achieve your most important goal and go for it! Learn from those things that don't go quite to plan and make sure whatever you learn is for you, positive and for the future.

This will help you to step up your game more than anything else in my view.

Be true to yourself

What does this mean? It's about being authentic as this will be something that helps you to stand out in the crowd. Go for the things that you truly believe in as this will come across to the client too. It will give you a greater sense of energy, commitment and purpose too. Ask yourself 'What would you need to change to be true to yourself?'

Believe in yourself

Henry Ford once said that whether you can believe you can do something or not it's probably true. That's because we cannot be more than we believe we can be. What do you believe about yourself. Remember that many of our beliefs are donated to us when we were very young by those closest to us. And, beliefs are not true they can be changed. Start 'Acting as If' you can do, be or have whatever you want and notice the difference and the reaction of your clients.

**Take time for you**

A workaholic can be boring to their family, friends and clients! On the other hand, someone who is well rested with other interests is more likely to apply themselves more effectively to their work. Work out how much time you took just for you over the last week. If it was less than 7 hours you have some changes to make. It's easy to allow our jobs to dominate our lives. I know I've done it. Think of one thing you are going to do differently next week to make more time for you so next time you're in front of a potential new client you can find some new connections with them.

Keep going until you reach your goal

I was once given some excellent advice. I asked my mentor how long I should pursue my goal to set up my own business. He told me to keep going until I got there. That was great advice because otherwise I may have given up by now. As it is, I changed four things in my 40's, I left my corporate career as a business consultant, I left my marriage, I set up my own business and I wrote my first book. So it's never too late to change!

Keep focused and take action

Finally, focus on what you want not what you don't want. It makes a BIG difference. Your energy flows where your attention goes so don't spread yourself too thinly. FOCUS makes the difference. And, of course you do have to do something different to create something different.

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Merchandising in a downturn

By John Stanley

There is one thing that is certain, shoppers change their shopping habits in a downturn. This is evident when you pick up the daily newspaper or watch the news and see the bankruptcy of specific retailers. The challenge for many retailers has been to react quickly to a rapidly changing economic climate.

We have seen national icon brands suffer as consumers drift towards store brands. Plus large upmarket stores have suffered while discount stores have blossomed. The challenge is how do you merchandise effectively in these changing times?

1. You have to keep ahead of the consumer and their habits are changing rapidly.
2. These shoppers are time poor and using new technology to find out about products.
3. The choice is whether you provide true value or a discount and what will work most effectively for your business.

Concept Shopping Inc in the US produced a report in December 2008 which helps retailers look at their merchandising and to develop a strategy for the new world. Their advice is first of all you have to be relevant to your shoppers. You need to know what the customer is and isn't buying and take the appropriate action in store. An example of how to do this is Ferndale Garden Centre in the UK. As part of their mix they sold gardening books, or should I say they did in 2008. This year the books have gone and have been replaced with another product range.

I have a client in Spain, Jarlimcant, who last year were in outdoor clothing and this year that category has gone. If a category is not generating the return you would expect, be ruthless and kick it out.

In today's complicated world, the consumer is looking for a simpler life, especially when they go shopping. They are still looking for an experience when they go shopping but they want the selection process to be simpler.

Shoppers often do not know what they want, so make the decision for them. Pre select the products. If you do the chances are you will increase the average sale per customer and it could cost you less as it can enable you to reduce the range. This can be achieved with signage such as Best Seller, Just Arrived, Latest Fashion, Best in Town, Cheapest in Town and other such signage. Plus once you have got to know the customer you can offer add-on's that can enhance your customers life or enjoyment.

The last thing you want is for shoppers to get bored, a bored shopper becomes a lapsed shopper, keep shoppers entertained. One of the simplest ways of doing this is to keep introducing new products to them. Make an event around new products. The event will keep the customer entertained. They may not buy that particular product, but they will come to the store to see what is new.

I have mentioned in previous articles that coupons are still major attraction to consumers. Research by DM Neeves/Pitney Bowen Bowes revealed how customers prefer to receive coupons, that research carried out in the USA revealed the following:

- 78% like coupons to arrive in the mail
- 63% via e-mail
- 52% as a newspaper insert
- 34% via a webpage
- 3% don't want them sent

Consumers still like getting mail. The grocery industry is the one where consumers like to receive the most coupons. The key to success is to ensure that you are in close touch with your customers and merchandise and communicate with them to make their lives easier.

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