



Podcast #030

Making the right First Impression

Hi everyone, it's Nicky and Liz here from The Marketing Menu, here with our fortnightly take on how to make marketing your business easier. And we've had a bit of a theme for the past few podcasts haven't we, Liz?

We most certainly have and we're going to continue on the theme about how to connect with people, particularly customers and clients but it could also be potential business partners.

Before we start, just a reminder listeners, that we are still offering our Create a Customer Identikit as a free course available from our website www.themarketingmenu.com which will really help you to understand how your customer behaves and how you can best communicate with them.

So, back to this week's subject which is about making the right first impression.

It takes just a quick glance, maybe three seconds, for someone to evaluate you when you meet for the first time. And in that short amount of time, the other person forms an opinion about you based on your appearance, your demeanour, your mannerisms, how you are dressed and your body language.

Which we covered in Podcast 028, of course.

Exactly. And these first impressions can be nearly impossible to reverse or undo, making those first encounters extremely important because they set the tone for all the relationships that follow.

So, whether they are in your career or personal life, it's important to know how to create a good first impression. And we're going to give you some suggestions for how you can do this.

It's important to remember that whoever you are about to meet is probably as nervous or full of anticipation as you.

Yes, it's easy to think everybody else knows exactly how to behave and you're the only one feeling the way you do.

Some people recommend getting pumped up before you go into a meeting by listening to a favourite piece of music that makes you feel good.

I had an image of those boxers that come into the arena with a towel over their head and the Rambo music then!

Whatever floats your boat!

So, what are the golden rules?

Firstly, be on time. Sounds obvious, doesn't it, but someone you are meeting for the first time, particularly a prospective client or customer, is not interested in your "good excuse" for running late. Plan to arrive a few minutes early. And allow flexibility for possible delays in traffic or taking a wrong turn.

Arriving early is much better than arriving late, isn't it, and is the first step in creating a great first impression. And being late isn't going to give a good impression of your business or the kind of service you are going to provide.

Good point. Secondly, try to be yourself and be at ease. If you're feeling uncomfortable or on edge, this can make the other person ill at ease and that's a sure way to create the wrong impression. If you are calm and confident, the other person will feel more at ease and leave a good lasting impression.

Now, of course, physical appearance matters. The person you're meeting for the first time doesn't know you and how you look is usually the first clue he or she has to go on.

But it certainly does not mean you need to look like a model to create a strong and positive first impression. (Unless you are interviewing with your local model agency, of course!)

Ha! The key to a good impression is to present yourself appropriately. What is it they say? A picture paints worth a thousand words, and so the "picture" you first present says much about you to the person you are meeting. Is your appearance saying the right things to help create the right first impression?

Start with the way you dress. What is the appropriate dress for the meeting or occasion? Oh my goodness, how many times have I asked myself this very question?!

Yes, me too! I still get myself in knots about how formal to be or should it be casual, and how casual is the right balance?

Absolutely. In a business setting, what is the appropriate business attire? Suit or jacket? And ask yourself what the person you'll be meeting is likely to wear – depending on what industry or trade your new contact is in, a pinstripe business suit may not strike the right note!

A clean, neat and tidy appearance is appropriate for most occasions. It'll also help you to feel "the part", so you'll be more calm and confident, too. Add all of this up and you are well on your way to creating a good first impression.

Now, a word about individuality. The good news is you can usually create a good impression without total conformity or losing your individuality. To make a good first impression you do need to "fit in" to some degree. But it all goes back to being appropriate for the situation. If in a business setting, wear appropriate business attire. If at a formal evening social event, wear appropriate evening attire.

And remember to smile! As the saying goes, "Smile and the world smiles too." So there's nothing like a smile to create a good first impression. Even if you're feeling really nervous, a warm and confident smile will put both you and the other person at ease.

But don't go overboard with this – people who take this too far can seem insincere and smarmy.

True. Don't forget your body language and we'd encourage you to listen again to Podcast 028 for some tips on how to project appropriate confidence and self-assurance. Stand tall, smile (of course), make eye contact, greet with a firm handshake.

So, before we look at what to say at your first meeting, this is a good point to remind listeners that they are listening to The Marketing Menu podcast which is free to download from iTunes, Blubrry, Stitcher, TuneIn and Soundcloud.

And, of course, from our website, themarketingmenu.com, where you can also find a transcript which some listeners are finding useful, particularly if they are accessing the podcast during their lunchtime at work or at home in the evenings when it's difficult to listen to the audio.

So, we've looked at how to look, next let's talk about what we can say.

Well, small talk goes a long way.

But some people find that really difficult and end up waffling. Or they go completely the other way and freeze.

I remember you saying, Nicky, that when you used to be nervous you put on a 'persona'?

Yes, that's right, I acted confident even if I didn't feel it. But, of course, it's important to be yourself otherwise it could end up misleading the other person!

Be genuine then. It may help you to prepare questions you have for the person you are meeting for the first time beforehand. Particularly if it's a potential client, doing some research beforehand is essential. Always check out their website, social media and LinkedIn profiles.

It's worth mentioning here, even though it's obvious, that you need to call the person by their correct name! Check at the beginning of the conversation if they liked to be called something else.

Yes, like Nicola or Nicky or Elizabeth or Liz!

Perfect examples! And repeat it throughout the conversation where appropriate without going over the top as it helps to fix the name in your mind.

It can help to emphasise something important you are about to say if you use their name. For instance: "The really important thing about using names, Nicky, is that it helps you remember them".

Take a few minutes to learn something about the person you meet for the first time before you get together. For instance, does he play golf? Or does she work with a local charitable foundation? Is there anything that you know of that you have in common with the person you are meeting? If so, this can be a great way to open the conversation and to keep it flowing. Find some common ground.

It goes without saying that good manners and polite, attentive and courteous behaviour help make a good first impression. In fact, anything less can ruin the one chance you have at making that first impression. So be on your best behaviour!

Talking about best behaviour, don't be tempted to get drawn into any conversation that may be perceived as gossip or slagging off other businesses. If someone has approached you to provide a service where they have previously used one of your competitors but they had a bad experience, stay detached even if you know they are right.

Yes, that's all about integrity, isn't it? You want to give the impression that you are fair and balanced. Plus if you gossip about someone else, your potential client might think you could do the same about them.

One modern courtesy worth mentioning is "turn off your mobile phone".

Oh, that drives me nuts! It's so rude when someone keeps checking their phone! Only if they explain that they have to keep it on for a particular emergency is it acceptable.

Exactly! What first impression will you create if you are already speaking to someone other than the person you are meeting for the first time? Your new acquaintance deserves 100% of your attention. Anything less and you'll create a less than good first impression.

And that's a really important point about giving them attention. If you're not, you may miss something important they have to say.

Or they may refer back to something they said earlier and you missed it.

That could be really embarrassing!

Exactly. And although you may be tempted to launch straight into telling them everything about you and what you do, you absolutely must let them have their time to speak.

That's one of my pet hates – people who only talk about themselves. So, be interested and be interesting.

I like that!

So, the key points of what we have talked about are that you have just a few seconds to make a good first impression and it's almost impossible ever to change it. So it's worth giving each new encounter your best shot.

Much of what you need to do to make a good impression is common sense. But with a little extra thought and preparation, you can hone your intuitive style and make every first impression not just good but great.

That brings us to the end of this week's podcast so thank you for listening in. If you are interested in learning more about questioning, listening or understanding body language you may be interested to know that we've just put together a course called Building Trusted Relationships in Business. Check out our website themarketingmenu.com for full details and to download the course

And we're offering a whopping 10% off this and all our courses for listeners. Simply use the coupon PODCAST (uppercase) at checkout.

Plus, of course, we are running our Signature Marketing Course in Southampton on 16th May, 13th June and 11th July where we will be teaching the 9 Steps you need to achieve marketing success. Again, the full details are on our website.

Yes, we're really looking forward to getting stuck into that training and really making a difference to the way our attendees look at their businesses.

Tune in again on Wednesday 2nd May for our next podcast.

Until then, it's a goodbye from me, Nicky, not Nicola Matthews.

And goodbye from me, Liz, not Elizabeth Gordon.

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