

## CHAPTER 14

# YOU ARE THE PRODUCT (SALES AND MARKETING)

### SELL YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY

One thing great marketers do (such as **McDonald's**, **Coca-Cola**, **Nike**, etc.) is adapt their message according to whom they're targeting. Notice how companies often market the same product in different ways depending on their audience. Not only do they often tweak their messages according to the races they are targeting, but they also adapt them according to other demographic factors.

**Think about it**, what appeals to older people about McDonalds is probably not what appeals to younger individuals. While both old and young people may regularly frequent McDonalds, they may do so for different reasons. Younger people might go to socialize, which is why an ad marketed toward younger people would correspondingly portray McDonalds as a place of socialization. Older people, on the other hand, might go for the senior citizen discount on coffee, which is why an ad targeting older people might correspondingly focus on that. Just in case you haven't noticed (and even though most companies probably will not openly admit it), many ads are adjusted according to race as well as varying other demographic differences.

Pay attention when you read magazines or see television programs marketed toward different audience types. You'll notice that the same company will run ads on certain programs that it doesn't run on others. As long as the ads aren't discriminatory or insulting, there is nothing wrong with this. In fact, I pointed it out to recommend you do the same thing. You definitely want to cater to your audience, because while two different groups may buy the

same product (which in terms of scholarships is YOU), they may buy them for different reasons (as in the McDonald's example), or different approaches may be necessary to get their attention.

**Remember**, in order to sell a product—no matter how great it is—you first have to get the consumer's attention. Even if different groups like the same product for the same reasons (taste, price, convenience, etc.), it still may be necessary to use different strategies to get the attention of each particular group. As mentioned before, price may get the attention of older people while socializing may get the attention of younger people. The same thing works for your application because YOU are the product! So you too must adapt YOUR marketing pitch accordingly! While a community service oriented scholarship sponsor probably wants to know a lot about your community service activities (which is why you want to highlight them), an organization focused on academics likely wants to know more about your academic performance. While it would be a good idea to include both academics and community service (as both will enhance your application), it would be best to adjust the extent and manner with which you present them in your applications and essays so that they correspond to the group you're targeting. For the academic sponsor, you probably want to have your academics out front, while for the community service group you expectedly need to have your community service endeavors prominently displayed. Likewise, the depth with which you state any given accomplishment or characteristic should vary depending on the sponsor of the scholarship for which you're applying.

**Polish the Truth.** By no means should you ever lie, but by all means you should spin your story! Two people can have the same experience, but one person will tell it much more interestingly than the other. It is about conveying enthusiasm. No matter how great a product is, it has to be sold effectively to be purchased. A key part of selling any product or service is using enthusiasm. **Think about it**, could you be won over to buy a product from someone who lacked enthusiasm for it? **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:** You

are the product and you must sell yourself! In your application and essay you must convey enthusiasm for your activities and accomplishments. Show the growth you got out of them and how you were able to contribute to the universe. By all means, tell the excellent story that is your life. We all have good stories to tell, it's just a matter of knowing how to tell them.

## **GLOW AND SHINE**

When you write an essay you are selling yourself, so make sure what you write is interesting to the reader. One thing I've found is that everyone has an interesting story on some level. A lot of times people who think they have nothing interesting to share end up being the most interesting ones. The key is differentiating yourself. You want your essay to stand out as if it had a special glow about it. You want to be appropriate but recognize you have leeway in doing so. You wouldn't want to discuss getting drunk at a party but you might want to write about a unique hobby you have such as knitting (particularly if the essay asks about your hobbies or things that make you unique). You might be able to comment on how a hobby improved your studying skills because it enhanced your ability to concentrate.

A person might have a higher GPA and better test scores than you, but you can position yourself as a better candidate if you present a better case of how you can contribute to the goals of the relevant scholarship sponsor. Moreover, if you and another candidate are virtually tied in terms of GPA, test scores, extracurricular activity, and in other regards, you better believe that the essay is going to carry a lot of weight. Illustrate things that represent you being a well-rounded person and explain how they make you well rounded. Express how you will benefit the school you plan to attend (or are currently attending). Do research, which may include studying the faculty, alumni, culture and overall decorum. Show how your skills and background will help complete their equation—as in their unique needs and desires.

## CREATE YOUR OWN THUNDER

**Very importantly, you have to create demand for what you have to offer.** This starts with showing how what you do creates value that can be beneficial to others. For example, if you are skilled at promoting events, you can show your school's student recruitment office how your skills can benefit it. This will give you opportunities to showcase and further refine your skills, as well as build valuable contacts that will likely yield future opportunities and, at a minimum, gleaming recommendations.

**Remember,** whatever your gifts and passions are, they have value to others. It's up to you to find out how they can be of value to others and then convince those people the value of what you have to offer. This is typically not an overnight process, but the key is developing the awareness that will eventually lead to things productively coming together.

Suppose you like to play video games. You can—with the aid of your school—organize a campus wide video game tournament. Although it might not be easy to convince an administrator of the value of this, it is your responsibility to sell the concept by demonstrating things such as how it would increase student morale, be something different, be in alignment with many students' interests, and provide the school with a forum to promote other programs. Remember, schools—especially colleges—are what the students make them. The more the students offer, the greater the school. Unfortunately, many schools have been so void of student participation that the administration forgets or fails to realize the value of student contributions. Rest assured, schools that have consistently realized the benefits of student contributions encourage them because they know how valuable they are!

## IT'S ABOUT DISTRIBUTION AND COLLABORATION

Distribution is key to selling any product (**remember**, YOU are the product). I **reiterate** that if outlets to distribute and showcase your talents don't exist, you have to make them. Many people make excuses, but as I expressed earlier, success means no excuses. Even if your school, church, or whatever organizations you are affiliated with don't recognize the benefits of your talents and ideas, rest assured that someone will as long as you persist. It's up to you to keep your antennae up for opportunities to offer your talents and create win-win situations for yourself and the other parties involved. Again, distribution is the key to selling any product or service. **Remember**, even if people want to buy a product, they can't if it's not available. Resultantly, many companies partner with others for the sake of combining their distribution channels. Furthermore, corporations are constantly merging because, in addition to other advantages, they realize the benefits of combining resources. **Hint:** When it comes to collaboration, the key is collaborating with dependable and trustworthy people—in both your scholarship journey and life in general. **Hint 2:** If you have a hard time finding reliable people, **make sure you're a reliable person!** You attract who and what you are.

## MARKET YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY

Great marketing occurs when a product has a lot of hype and lives up to the hype. The hype creates an awareness that creates an interest in and demand for the product. When the product satisfies the hype, consumers are satisfied and tell more people about it. This results in more satisfied customers, which results in a continuous cycle of increasing sales and profits. Both promotion and a great product are needed to maximize sales. A product can be the best product available, but if nobody knows about it—it doesn't make

any difference. It will sit on the shelf. If a product doesn't live up to its hype, people will quickly find out and tell others! So **remember**, great marketing occurs when hype is built around a superior product. Therefore, emphasis on the importance of marketing can't be overdone. Why? Because the best products don't necessarily get the most sales, usually the ones with the best marketing do. I know I stated that if a product was unsatisfactory people would quickly dismiss it no matter how good the marketing. That's true, but so is this—if a product is effectively marketed and people like it, they will often stick with it without trying any competing products. The competing products might be better, but if consumers try—and like—a better marketed product before using any other brand, they likely won't give the competing brands a try even though they would surely like them more if they did. Thus (although great marketing will kill a bad product), once products reach a certain standard of satisfaction, the one that is marketed the best will generally sell the most, and it might not necessarily be the best product.

**Think about it**, as long as a consumer is adequately satisfied with a product (and is accustomed to using it), they usually could care less about other existing brands that they know nothing about—even if those brands are superior. As long as they are pleased with the one they're using (in terms of quality, availability and price), looking for a better product that they don't know exists is not a priority. It's the same with students and scholarship money. Past a certain threshold (usually the grade point average), it is all about those who market themselves and their accomplishments more effectively. One student can be better than the other in terms of grades, extracurricular activities, leadership and in various other areas, but if another student better sells his or herself—even if in actuality he or she is not even on the same level of the other person—the person that sales his or herself the best will win. This is something that I know very well from personal experience. So, (in a sense) you must generate hype around yourself, but you have to live up to (and ideally) exceed the buzz that is created about you.

It is true, to some extent, that excellence sells itself—but only up to a point (and sometimes not at all). In other words, if you perform excellently, people will sometimes take note of you. However, excellence is often ignored because it isn't effectively marketed (or somebody else takes the credit, which is still a result of ineffective marketing). **Never forget**, for all those professors and advisors who will automatically recognize your excellence, there are numerous executives as well as other prominent and powerful people who are willing and want to help you, but won't because they don't know you exist. Don't limit yourself! Be proactive (and tactful) in successfully marketing yourself.