

6 Things You Can Do to Enhance Your Communication Credibility

Michael Lovas & Pam Holloway

Most people think Communication occurs when information is sent, like in a verbal statement or letter. That's wrong. That's called a one-way "transmission." Communication happens when the other person receives the information. Why is that important to you?

In the traditional business communication model, you lose control of your message as soon as it is sent. Our contention is that, in the traditional model, you never had control of it in the first place because you didn't have accurate information about your target market.

Without accurate information, the target is very likely to misunderstand your intended message. What if that message is the essence of your business identity, your offer, your plea for donations?

Having guided many people through exercises to help them improve the accuracy of their intended messages, Pam and I know (all too well) that human communication is a sloppy and inexact activity.

That's OK if your message includes grunts and deals with food or warmth. But, when the message is more sophisticated, such as your marketing and selling message, it's nearly always off-target.

Corporations spend \$millions on their branding. Many of those dollars go toward assuring that the message is "targeted." Still, any word or phrase that could be misunderstood definitely will be. Anything that is ambiguous or vague will give the wrong message. Any image, logo or photo that could possibly be misinterpreted will be.

"At a fundamental level verbal messages convey meanings the speaker has encoded into the words of an utterance, but a listener who has understood the utterance has gone beyond the literal meaning of the words and grasped the particular sense in which the speaker intended them to be understood. In order to do so, communicators must make their co-participants' perspectives part of the process of formulating and interpreting messages. Thus any communicative exchange is implicitly a joint or collective activity in which meaning emerges from the participants' collaborative efforts."

-- Robert M. Krauss, professor of Psychology, Columbia University, director of the Human Communication Lab

Additionally, any one-way, out-bound message that fails to include the perceptions of the intended audience will most likely suffer from gross inaccuracies in reception.

In other words, the people who receive the message are the ones who determine its meaning and value – not the sender. So, you have to collect the target's perceptions prior to releasing your out-bound message.

What about you? Now, if what I just said is true, who do your customers think you are? More important, who do your *prospects* think you are? What value do they think you represent to them? For many businesses, all the target market has to go by are the inaccurate messages you give them. If your marketing message is anything like most, what you're saying is NOT what people are receiving.

Huh? Yes, unless you capture the perceptions of your target market before talking, writing or designing, your message is most likely off-target. Huh? Look at it this way: because very few professionals and businesses understand this process, it is highly probable that every person they deal with has the wrong perception of who they are, what they do, and the value they represent.



There's no way this short paper could be a comprehensive class in how to fix that situation. However, if you'll follow these simple steps, your outbound messages will at least be more accurate. If you'd like personal help with your marketing, please let us know. Pam and I provide a service called "Marketing Therapy." Through it, we nip, tuck, tweak and perfect your messages so they are psychologically on-target and relevant to your target market.

In the meantime, here are six things you can do to become more aware of how you are perceived by your stakeholders, and correct that perception.

1. Find out how others see you

See yourself as others see you. Get a second, third and fourth outside perspective. Interview the people who work in your company. Do it privately and get them to describe how they see the firm and how they think outsiders looking in see it.

Don't stop with your employees, ask your customers. Ask your suppliers. Ask anyone would either is or could become a stakeholder. Pay attention. Listen to what's going on around you. Listen not only to those from whom you ask for feedback – but to those you didn't.

Try to gather intel on what your competitors are saying about you. How about potential employees? "Off the record, why do you want to work here? What do we represent to you?" Talk to former employees and former suppliers. What are they saying about you?

Finally create a matrix of all the comments. Look for any common themes in the feedback. Identify the areas that you can address immediately.

2. Get to Know Your Target Market

This is where most “marketing” slams into a brick wall. Very few firms can describe their target market in realistic terms. Age, zip code, household income, purchase history – those things tell you something about your target market, but not very much. They describe details of a mass market, but mass marketing has been ineffective for more than ten years for all but the largest of mega-corporations. So, who is your target market? And, how do you describe them?

Let’s throw the book out the window and look at target markets in a completely different way. What would you love to know about a potential customer hidden out there? Mainly, how they use your type of product. That tells you what they value about your product. If you know that, you can create compelling, personal and relevant marketing. And, that includes sales presentations, webinars, seminars and keynotes.

So, how do you discover that information? Research, analysis and projection. Research the social media sites that are related to your product. Read the comments pro and con about how people perceive it. What do they like and dislike? What else do they want. We live in an incredible world where you can learn those things with relative ease. But, even more astounding, you can actually communicate with them directly and get even more information. All of the little bits of intel that you collect combine to give you a terrific picture of what to offer, how to offer it, and who will be attracted to it.

3. Speak the Language of Your Target Market

Once you get to know your target audience, in terms of what they want and how they use your product, your next step is to learn to speak their “language.” Those are the two most difficult objectives in modern business.

Speaking the language means using specific words, phrases, structures, concepts, colors, images and designs that appeal to the mental filters of your target market. Those elements deliver your message. It means giving the right people a message that they want to see – one they might even be looking for.

But, you have to know what they want before you create the messages.



Consider what we just said. Traditionally, a firm creates a marketing piece to promote a product and then sends it out. That's a one-way transmission. That type of marketing is still being done, but it is becoming less and less effective. The smart marketer looks at the landscape and figures out what potential buyers want that is relevant to his product. Then, he builds the marketing around those findings. In a real way, your target market actually directs what you say in your marketing, so it's a two-way conversation, rather than a one-way transmission.

NOTE: These next three items deal with a different aspect of communication credibility. They are activities you can engage in that will communicate your credibility through behaviors. Remember, behavior is just another way we communicate.

4. Choose your *associations* wisely

One of the main mental filtering mechanisms we all unconsciously use is association, or generalization. This is how we know how to open just about every door on the planet, and why we get confused by push-button car ignitions. "What? No key?" In that same way, we associate (or generalize) an individual with the people (both professionally and personally) he/she associates with. And, we associate a company with firms in the same industry, and with the other companies it does business with.

In other words, you are the sum of your relationships. Every relationship or association either positively enhances your credibility and reputation, or it detracts from it. This dynamic is always moving in one direction or the other. It does not remain static and it does not hover in the middle. But, the good news is, you can take control of it.

Make a list of all your business relationships. Analyze each in terms of whether it adds value or detracts value from your reputation. If the other firm is soiled, distance yourself or sever the link. Otherwise, you risk looking like you support a firm or person with questionable qualities.

Develop a profile of a person that represents the polar opposite of you. List that hypothetical person's characteristics. Then, list the characteristics and determine where you score on them.

Finally, ask yourself these questions:

- Does this relationship work for me?
- Are there common values or a shared purpose?
- Is this relationship important to my long-term goals?
- Is this the kind of company or individual I want to be associated with?

- Does this association add credibility or detract from it?

5. Tell the Truth

When you make a mistake, “fess up.” Admit it. Customers are far more likely to forgive a mistake than they are a cover-up or a withholding of information.

Many people find this extremely difficult to do. That’s because they attach emotion to the information. Instead, consider that the information is just that – data. And, data has no connection to emotion. Think of the data as though it’s just numbers.

Don’t hide your services inside or behind marketing-eeze or legal-eeze. Describe distinctly and coherently who you are and what you do. The more open and honest you are about what you can (and cannot) or will (or won’t) do, the more your customers and prospects will respond.

6. Walk the Talk

There’s a story among the consulting ranks of a renowned time management consultant who responded to questions about his program by saying “I haven’t had time to look at it.”

It appears that it is not only time management consultants who are afflicted with this. Financial consultants with bad personal investment track records, Insurance guys who don’t use their own products, marriage counselors who have never been married or who have multiple divorces, and so on.

If you are concerned about your integrity and credibility (and you better be), never, under any circumstances try to sell something that you’re not. Inevitably someone will call you on it. Strive to be congruent in everything you do.

As coaches, we’re often contacted by new sales people. They usually have concerns about their level of expertise and ask us how to deal with that. “How can I convince someone that I’m an expert when I’m not?” Our answer is always, “Don’t. Don’t pretend you’re something you’re not. So, what are you?” Then, together we figure out what it is that the person actually does well.

It could initiate the relationship, establish a network of other experts, approach service with the big-picture perspective, possess great capacity to deal with details. The key to being congruent with who you are is to understand who you are and what natural strengths and talents you have.

In Conclusion...

Why is credibility important here? Simply because it represents movement in a positive direction. It distinguishes you from everyone who does not understand how to use Communication Psychology to craft and deliver relevant, accurate messages to their specific target market segments. Until you can clearly identify each element in the communication chain, you will experience pops and sputters as the intended message misfires with the intended target audience. When you want help with this process, just give us a call.

About the Authors

Michael Lovas, co-founder and Principal of About People is the author of ten books, three columns, and a thousand articles on Professional Credibility and Psychological Sales and Marketing. Michael holds the distinction of creating “Credibility Marketing” in 1991. He’s also a fascinating trainer of Psychological Selling.



Michael is a respected credibility coach, keynote speaker and author. He teaches professionals how to: read their A-level clients, attract more of them, and connect with them in a meaningful way.

He has earned three prestigious certifications: Master Practitioner of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), Licensed Trainer of NLP and Clinical Hypnotherapist.

Pam Holloway, co-founder and principle of AboutPeople, is an internationally recognized speaker and expert in Human Dynamics – the cultural, generational, and individual psychological variables that are key to understanding customers, markets, organizations and employees. Even better, Pam is a master at helping people apply these important, yet complex concepts.

Pam co-developed several proprietary programs designed to help companies and individuals attract, read, connect with and engage their target audience. She works with Sales and Marketing, Human Resources and Research and Development organizations. She has authored and co-authored a number of books and workbooks and writes for several industry publications including Senior Advisor, the Horse’s Mouth and Financial Services Journal. She speaks to audiences in both the US and Europe and provides consulting to a variety of companies including Met Life and Microsoft.

Prior to launching AboutPeople, Pam was a Knowledge Management consultant, speaker, and writer. Her KM tenure includes 12 years with ExxonMobil and 3 years in private practice consulting. Pam has a MS in Health Psychology, undergraduate degrees in Liberal Arts and Computer Science, and a variety of graduate work in Cognitive Science, Organizational Behavior, and Neuro-linguistic Programming.

Michael and Pam are married (to each other). They live in Spokane, Washington with their dogs (Eva and Woody), cat (Georgia), and Michael's big Harley.

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Your Reward.

If you like the information in this report, you will love what Michael and Pam can do for your specific business. As business psychologists, Michael and Pam regularly perform Marketing Therapy for businesses. It's a psycho-analysis on client marketing materials and sales presentations. This is a service truly unlike anything you've ever seen before. It tells you exactly where the psychological problems are, and then tells you precisely how to fix them.

Contact Michael and arrange to send him one of your marketing pieces. Time permitting, he and Pam will perform their Marketing Therapy for you. It's just our way of reaching out to you and helping you improve your results.

