

Understanding the Principles of Permission Marketing

In my entry into the world of Internet Marketing, one of the books that had a great influence on me and which largely shaped the techniques that I have subsequently developed is the book by Seth Godin, “Permission Marketing.” At the time of its writing, Mr. Godin was the Vice-President for Direct Marketing of Yahoo, then the undisputed giant in the World Wide Web. Aptly subtitled “Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers,” the title alone fully encapsulates the overall guiding paradigm of the permission marketing principle.

For a long time before the World Wide Web came into the picture, marketers were engaged in an ever-spiraling advertising approach which Godin calls “interruption marketing.” The main goal of this type of marketing approach is to grab a potential customer’s attention from whatever he is doing and keep that attention long enough for the advertiser to make his pitch. It could be in the form of a TV commercial which interrupts our favorite program, or a telemarketer which intrudes into a quiet time being enjoyed. Godin claims that interruption marketing has lost its potency and in fact, has become an increasing source of annoyance for most of its targeted public.

Advertising on billboards has moved to moving boards on buses and taxis. Posters that previously were placed sparsely in key locations in a supermarket have been transferred to the floor in the hope of catching buyers’ eyesight as they traverse the grocery floor while pushing their shopping carts. As consumers responded by deliberately shutting off these forms of advertisements from their consciousness as much as they can, advertisers have erroneously responded with more vigorous interruption. Instead of slowing down on their annoying tactic, advertisers have escalated the level of interruption in the false appreciation that this was the answer. Unfortunately, as more and more statistics and studies have pointed out, it is not.

Godin proposes a shift in thinking and appreciation of the way companies look at their customers by advising them to increase their profits by selling more things to fewer customers. An idea that was originally popularized by Don Peppers and Martha Rogers in their book “The One to One Future,” Godin recommends the general idea of focusing on customer share instead of market share. Permission Marketing shares the general thinking behind what Peppers and Rogers expounded in their book: “Getting a new customer is expensive.” The focus then of a company should be on identifying their more profitable customers, keeping them longer, and getting far more money from them over time.

But customers are not acquired overnight. As Seth Godin clearly illustrates in his book, the key then to a profitable long-term business is to grow your customer base by turning ordinary strangers into friends, and then eventually turning these friends into customers. The underlying principle in the whole chain of increasing levels of relationships is a corresponding increasing level of permission. As your business gains more and more trust from your interactions with

potential clients, you also acquire increasing permission from them to educate them about your company and your products.