The 7 Big Lies About Marketing

Action Plan Marketing

The 7 Big Lies About Marketing
That are Holding Your Business Back

by Robert Middleton
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Virtually any self-employed professional who needs to attract more clients to maintain or grow their business also experiences some degree of resistance or aversion to marketing.

The purpose of this e-book is to give you a whole new perspective on marketing. With this new perspective you will likely experience less resistance and more ease about marketing, enabling you to attract more of your ideal clients with integrity and without hype.
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But where does this resistance come from in the first place? To put it bluntly, it comes from lies that you tell yourself about marketing. These lies make marketing look bad, unprofessional, lacking in integrity and, in general, something to avoid. As long as you continue to believe these lies, you will continue to resist marketing.

These seven lies are:

1. Marketing, at its core, is dishonest.
2. I’m not the marketing or sales type.
3. Marketing activities are confusing and complicated.
4. Following up with prospects is unwelcomed.
5. Selling is nothing but manipulation.
6. I can’t sell my services for what they’re worth.
7. I don’t have time to market my services.

We’ll be exploring these lies one at a time and showing you that not only are they not true, but that the exact opposite is usually much closer to the truth.
Marketing Lie # 1
Marketing, at its core, is dishonest.

It’s easy to see why this lie has been perpetuated for so long. It’s because some people and businesses do use marketing to misrepresent their products and services. In fact you see it a lot. No, marketing doesn’t have a very good name. For many people it’s become synonymous with deception, half-truths and exaggerated claims.
I was recently doing some research on car insurance companies and was shocked to discover that the very best known insurance companies such as Allstate, Geico, State Farm and Progressive had some of the very worst service records in the industry. Interestingly, the companies who advertised the most had the worst reputations for bad service.

We see this in advertising for all kinds of products and services. For instance, food companies get away with promoting the “health benefits” of foods that are primarily made from refined grains and corn syrup—junk food essentially. And if you dig a little deeper, it’s easy to discover example after example of deception and misrepresentation in almost every product category you can think of.

And the more we learn about how companies use marketing to stretch the truth, if not downright lie to us, it’s understandable that we would be skeptical about any kind of marketing.
I seem to be making the case that marketing is inherently dishonest, but that isn’t the case. After all, not all marketing is dishonest; much of it accurately represents products and services and educates us about their value and benefits.

The question is not if marketing is honest or not, it’s, “Are you honest, and willing and able to use marketing honestly?”

To do this we need to see marketing through a more neutral lens. The dictionary definition of marketing is: “the action or business of promoting and selling products or service.” The definition of promotion is: “publicizing a product, organization or venture so as to increase sales or public awareness.”

Another way of saying this is that the purpose of marketing is to get the word out about one’s product or service so that more people know about it and are attracted to it.” Is there anything inherently dishonest about that? Absolutely not!
Now remember that this article is about marketing and selling of professional services. If you start to see marketing simply as a communication vehicle to make people aware of your services and to get them to pay more attention to the value you are offering, then some of the “negative charge” about marketing may dissipate.

What I’ve discovered in helping Independent professionals market their services for almost 30 years is that marketing is really about educating your prospective clients about how you can help them. Any kind of misrepresentation or hype is not only unnecessary, it can actually detract from your marketing effectiveness.

After all, once you’ve marketed your services and gotten the attention of prospects and engaged them in conversations about what you do and how you can help them, ultimately you’ve got to work with them, often in very personal ways (such as a business consultant, executive coach, or financial planner). So
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you want to make sure that your marketing has integrity and that, “What they see is what they get.”

OK, so maybe marketing isn’t dishonest after all. This is good news! But can you think of yourself as a marketer? Are you the marketing and sales type or is that too much of a stretch?

If you get hooked by the following lie, marketing may continue to be a struggle for you.
Marketing Lie #2
I’m Not the Marketing or Sales Type

This is a lie that I hear Independent Professionals telling themselves all the time. This is very closely tied to lie #1. After all, if you believe that marketing is inherently dishonest, the last thing you want to be is dishonest. So to say you are the marketing and sales type would be say you are dishonest!

But if you were to think of yourself as someone who would be happy to share the value of your services and the real difference they make to your clients, then you actually are the marketing and sales type!
After all, you’re not ashamed of your business are you? You feel that your services benefit your clients, don’t you? You know the value you have to offer, don’t you? Of course you do!

If you can say yes to all of these, then you are most definitely the marketing and sales type. You have integrity and are happy and proud to share information about your services with dignity.

So what exactly does an Independent Professional who is the marketing and sales type do to market their services? Here’s a list of things that you might never have thought of as marketing your services:

1. If people ask you about how your services work, you are happy to explain it to them.

2. If you were to give a talk to prospective clients, you would share some valuable information and educate them about the issues your clients face and how you help them.
3. If someone wanted to know more about your services, you’d have this information available on your website, in articles, and perhaps in an e-newsletter or blog.

4. If a prospect wanted to know if your services were for them or not, you’d set up a time to talk with them, find out their needs and explain how your services might meet those needs.

Now how terrible is any of that? Well, it’s not terrible at all. It’s what I call marketing and selling. At its core, marketing is simply communicating the value of your services to those who might benefit from those services.

Imagine that you were interested in someone’s professional services and wanted more information. Would you be happy if they didn’t communicate to you about their services, if they had no information to offer, if they couldn’t answer your questions, if they wouldn’t meet with you to discuss their services and how they could help you?
No, you’d be put off. Avoiding communicating about your business is certainly much worse than engaging in that communication. All you really need to be a marketing and sales type is to have a professional service that provides real value and be willing to communicate honestly about those services.

Of course, you also may realize that it might take some skills and training to communicate more effectively about your services. Although it’s a natural process, not everyone is equally good at it. You would want to develop a marketing message that got the attention and interest about your services so they immediately understood the value you offered. You’d want to put some work into developing some written materials, a presentation, etc.

But you don’t have to be an expert at all of this to be the marketing and sales type. The main requirement is a commitment to serve your clients with integrity and a desire to help them solve problems and achieve their desired outcomes.
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With this mindset switch about marketing, you’ll find marketing to be an interesting and engaging pursuit that will enable you to serve more people. And isn’t that what you want?

OK, now you may start to see that you could be a marketing and sales type after all. But how about actually learning and implementing marketing activities? Is there a lie that’s stopping you in that area?
Marketing Lie #3
Marketing activities are confusing and complicated

I hope you are starting to realize that marketing your professional services can be an honest and noble pursuit. Marketing is a perfectly legitimate way to grow your business with integrity. You are now faced with the reality that you must actually do something to market your services.

It its simplest form, that means developing a marketing message and some materials, such as articles and a
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website, and then getting your message in front of your ideal clients.

The truth is that there are infinite ways to market your services and it can seem rather overwhelming. But before you even start to get the word out, you need to figure out where to get the word out.

If you ask your friends and associates how they market themselves, the answer you will hear most often is “though word-of-mouth.” And what that means is that those who know, like and trust them, refer business to them.

It’s not complicated. Don’t market to strangers. Market to those you have affiliations with. And if you don’t have affiliations, find some!

When I started my business, the first thing I did was find organizations to network with. I found professional and business groups, chambers of commerce, and morning networking groups. I joined these groups, attended, participated, and got known. I practiced my marketing
messages, offered printed materials, sent letters, and followed up. Before long I started to attract my first clients.

I started my business pre-Internet and pre-email. As unimaginable as this is today, I found ways to stay in touch with a one-page newsletter every other month and postcard mailings to the list that I had built from collecting business cards through networking and speaking.

Those postcard mailings invited people to introductory workshops at my office in San Francisco. And I also contacted various professional organizations and gave presentations.

So essentially I was communicating to prospects in three ways:

- Networking
- Publishing
- Speaking

And things are not so different today, except that all of these activities can be supplemented or replaced by the Internet. In-person networking can be
supplemented by social media, hard-copy mailings have been replaced by email announcements and information on websites and blogs. Teleclasses and webinars can reach even more people than live talks.

Yes, all of these activities require some knowledge, practice and skills. But at the heart of them all is simply communicating the value of your services. And this is something you can do.

When I started my business, I wasn’t very good at marketing. My original services were organizing and coaching on time and project management for small business owners. I was hardly a brilliant marketer, but I simply communicated sincerely about what I did and how I could help my clients. And my business grew.

Once people realize that marketing is about honest and sincere communication about their businesses, it gets easier, but this next lie can stop your marketing in its tracks.
Marketing Lie #4
Following up with prospects is unwelcomed

In working with thousands of clients over the years, I’ve noticed that the most resisted and feared activity is doing follow-up. What I mean by follow-up is calling someone on the phone and/or sending them a follow-up email after an initial contact.

Imagine this scenario: You met a prospective client at a networking gathering. They asked you about your business and you explained how you helped your
clients. They showed some interest, and at the end you exchanged business cards.

But now what? What do you do next? They seemed interested in your services but you don’t want to be presumptive. What if you call, all excited about working with them and they brush you off?

You run this scenario over and over inside your head, imagining the possible rejection, and then you decide to put it off, hoping they’ll call you back if they are interested (sorry, not going to happen).

This kind of scenario is repeated thousands of times a day every day. The avoidance of follow-up is, simply put, a business killer. But this avoidance is all based on a lie! So let’s dig down to the truth.

Nobody wants to be rejected. That’s painful. But what is this fear of rejection based on? We think that people will not welcome follow-up calls. We believe that if we call, their first reaction will be disinterest. We believe that our follow-up is an interruption.
Let’s turn the tables for a moment. I’ve been at many networking gatherings where I’ve had a conversation with someone who took my card and said that they’d follow-up with more information. But in almost 30 years of business I can count on one hand the number of people who actually followed up with me! And in most cases I wanted them to.

Don’t you think it would be exactly the same with you? Wouldn’t someone who showed some interest in your services welcome your follow-up? And not only that…

It’s your job to follow up with a prospect. It is not the job of the prospect to follow up with you. Never. The ball is always in your court. It is always your move. Always. That’s not being pushy; it’s being proactive.

Now, that’s useful to know, but it might only mitigate the fear a little. What you want to do is change the game to where the prospect is even more open to receiving your follow-up call. To do this, you need to think of the game differently and play it differently.
By the way, I use the word “game” a lot when talking about marketing. I don’t think of a game where you win and the prospect loses, but where you both win. If you connect with a prospect and you have something of value to offer and they need what you offer, everyone wins if you connect and move things forward.

Remember that the whole purpose of marketing is to communicate the value of your services and to educate your prospects about how your services can help them.

The thing to remember is that you often need to do that more than once! It can take multiple exposures and connections before you get someone’s attention and interest. So let’s revisit our scenario.

You meet someone at a networking event, have a conversation and exchange cards. Do you think this person understands everything about your business? Not a chance. So why not do a little more educating and pave the way for a follow-up call?
After you exchange cards, imagine yourself saying: “I wrote an article about what we’ve been discussing. It’s called “7 Ways to Improve Your Profits Without Sacrificing Service.” Can I send you a copy?” Guess what, they’ll almost always say yes. And then you say, “Great, let me send you a copy by email. And I’d also like to find out more about your business. When’s the best time to reach you?” They’ll tell you.

By providing some valuable information, you’ve set up a completely different game. They are now expecting your call. Your call will be welcomed. And all you really do on that call is find out more about them, talk a little more about your services and see if it makes sense to explore further in a more in-depth meeting.

The thing I’ve heard from clients who did this is that their follow-up call was almost always welcomed. Perhaps it took a few times to connect by phone, but when they did, their prospect was open to talking. And many of those connections ultimately turned into meetings and into new clients.
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So, it’s simply not true that follow-up calls are unwelcomed. In many cases it’s just the opposite. If you remember that the whole purpose of marketing is to communicate value and to educate your prospects, follow-up will be a whole lot easier and rejection will be the exception, not the rule.

Now let’s make the transition from marketing to selling.

Many think selling is the same as marketing. The distinction I make about marketing and selling is that marketing is about building trust through information, familiarity and experience with you and the services you offer. Selling only starts when a prospect is ready to explore if your services can help them solve a problem or produce a certain result.

But there’s one big issue about selling…
Marketing Lie #5
Selling is nothing but manipulation

If marketing is difficult for many people, selling is even harder. In the same way that marketing is seen as dishonest, selling is seen as manipulative. However, if we look closely, we’ll see that selling is most effective when it’s not manipulative.

The dictionary defines manipulation as: “Control or influence a person cleverly, unfairly or unscrupulously.”

Do some people use manipulation in selling? No question about it. But do you have to? No you don’t. And in my experience, a non-manipulative approach to
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selling is much more powerful and effective than manipulation can ever be.

Let’s define selling: “Give or hand over something in exchange for money.” So when you sell your services, your prospects get the benefits of your professional services and you get paid for that. Nothing inherently manipulative in that, is there?

I recently asked one of my clients, who is a sales management consultant, what he thought the biggest mistake people made in the selling process. He said, “Spending too much time trying to convince people.”

He hit the nail on the head. If all your attention is on convincing people that your services are great and that they should buy them, you are bound to cross the line into manipulation.

But isn’t that exactly what selling is – convincing people to buy from you? Well, no it is not. Not even close.

The purpose of selling is to discover if there is a legitimate match between your clients’ needs and
wants and your ability to meet those needs and wants by providing your professional services. And you don’t get to that match by trying to convince or pressure someone to do anything!

How you get to an agreement to work together is by first discovering, in great depth, exactly what those needs and wants are. A selling conversation that works is where you ask questions and listen about 3/4 to 2/3 of the time and talk about 1/4 to 1/3 of the time.

And you’re not asking questions and listening so that you can respond with the right words to manipulate your prospect into buying!

You are asking questions and listening to determine if there’s a real fit.

You want to know about three key areas: 1. The prospect’s situation – what’s working and what’s not working, 2. The prospect’s goals – where they want to go, and 3. The prospect’s challenges – what is holding them back from achieve their goals.
Yes, you must be prepared; yes, you must ask the right questions and really listen; yes you must know what to say and how to say what’s necessary to match their needs to your solution. But no manipulation, i.e., coercion, on your part is required.

After you’ve learned all of this from a prospect, you should know very clearly whether or not your services will fit their needs or not. And that’s when you explain in a very straightforward way exactly how you can help them.

If there isn’t a fit, you should let them know. After all, there’s nothing worse than signing up a client when you don’t feel confident that your services will serve that client. Things will just backfire on you. I’ve seen it happen many times.

When Independent Professionals start to think of selling this way, all the effort and struggle drops away. Since you’re not trying to convince someone to do anything they don’t want to do, what’s left is real interest, openness, and a focus on making a difference.
What people discover when they approach selling this way is that they get little resistance from the prospect. It’s a cooperative exploration of possibilities, not a confrontation.

Let’s say you take everything we’ve covered so far to heart:

1. You realize that marketing is not inherently dishonest, so you stop resisting it and start getting the word out about the value of your professional services.

2. You see that you really are the marketing and sales type simply because communicating about the value of your services has integrity and dignity.

3. You start to implement marketing strategies one at a time that focus on communicating your value to those in your network and community, and your visibility and credibility increases.
4. You realize that following up with prospects is actually welcomed and you inform prospects in such a way that they want to hear back from you.

5. You understand that selling does not need to be manipulative, but can be a process where you learn about the situation, goals and challenges of your prospects and then explain how your services can help them.

So far so good? Well, the next marketing lie can also hold your business back. And if you tell yourself this lie, you’ll never make the money or have the success that’s possible for you.
Marketing Lie #6
I can’t sell my services for what they’re worth

I can’t tell you how many clients I’ve worked with who did stellar work for their clients but were undercharging for their services. Sometimes they were charging less than half of what they should have been charging.

This is another very sticky issue for many Independent Professionals. A great number of them are very altruistic. They are completely dedicated to their business and helping people, and don’t want to charge too much. They don’t want to be seen as greedy.
But this practice only undermines their businesses. They don’t have enough money for a nice office; they get behind on their bills; they work long hours; they save little money for vacations or their retirement. What good does it do you if you are serving your clients but ultimately not serving yourself?

In most cases, these problems would be resolved simply by raising your rates. But how do you do that? Where do you start?

Here’s how to think about this: You need to stop thinking about selling your time or your process and think about selling a solution, a result, or an outcome.

If you work with a client and produce the desired results, what is it really worth to them? This might be easier to figure out if your clients are businesses, as you may be able to determine a bottom-line result that’s measurable. But even with more personal services, there is a measure of value that your clients can usually identify, such as improving a relationship, achieving an important project or learning a fulfilling skill.
Imagine that you have a client who is qualified to buy your services. For now, put aside what the service would cost or what you think they could afford and ask yourself, “If I did everything in my power and within the limits of my skills and expertise to produce a tangible result or outcome for this client, how would I package my services to deliver that outcome?”

Now this is key, because what I’ve observed is that Independent Professionals rarely do that. In fact, if push came to shove, their underpriced services would not be able to consistently deliver that outcome.

Can you imagine hiring a house builder who said, “Well, I know you can’t afford a lot of money, so we’ll try really hard to build a house for you.” No, you want a house builder to say, “We will build this house for you and you’ll be happy with it. This is what it will cost.”

So a professional service is not about trying to produce a result for a client at the lowest possible cost. It’s about doing everything possible to help that client produce the results they want at a fair price.
You want to offer a service with that in mind. Sell the result, the solution, the outcome, not the process. Understanding this can change your business completely.

Your prospects will only buy what you are marketing and selling, so why not offer a bigger possibility, a larger outcome, something that would make a more tangible difference to them?

And by the way, if you offer services and programs like that, clients will pay considerably more for them. They will be happy to pay more if you can show them that you will deliver the results they want.

When you get to the other side of all these marketing lies, you’re going to see how much you’ve held yourself back. And you’ve told these lies because of some kind of fear. When you see that these fears are completely unfounded, new possibilities open up.

However, some of these lies die hard. After all, they are there to protect you from possible rejection, disapproval.
from peers and to prevent you from looking bad or greedy or even failing. Often they are there to protect an outmoded self-image.

It’s time to stop telling these lies to yourself and start putting your marketing into action!

The final marketing lie is especially insidious because it may seem truer than all of them. But if you don’t face this one directly, your intention to attract more of your ideal clients will fade away and be forgotten completely.

And now, the final Marketing Lie:
Marketing Lie #7
I don’t have time to market my services

This lie is often the final marketing holdout. Even after you’ve navigated the first six and realized that none of them are true, and you’re getting excited to begin to market your business, you might start telling yourself that you don’t have time to do all of this.

Well, if you have more clients than you can handle, if the stream of word-of-mouth business keeps coming,
and you’re charging more than you ever have, then perhaps you don’t have enough time. But until you’re there, you need to make the time!

There’s a simple rule of thumb for the time you should spend marketing your business: 20% of your time. If you work a 40-hour week, that’s 8 hours a week or one full day per week. And if you don’t have enough clients yet, that amount should be even more. In fact, the amount could increase to 60% or even 80% until you’ve attracted enough clients so that you can scale back on the time spent marketing.

One of the best things I ever did for myself several years ago was to declare Monday as my marketing day. What I do on Mondays is write my More Clients email newsletter, write articles like this, work on changes to my website, plan various marketing campaigns for my services and follow-up with people.

Ultimately, you need to figure this out for yourself, but other than your first priority of taking care of clients, marketing should always be your #2 priority.
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You can get a bookkeeper for your books, delegate administrative tasks to your Virtual Assistant and organize your email so it doesn’t eat up huge amounts of your time. In some cases, you can delegate some marketing activities (such as the technical parts of your website, design work, etc.), but ultimately you need to be responsible for your marketing communication.

How you do this is very easy, actually. Institute special times to work on your marketing and do not schedule client meetings or other meetings at those times. For instance, I never hold client meetings on Monday. Never. I found I could easily fit them in at other times during the week once I instituted this rule.

OK, now that you’re aware of the 7 Marketing Lies and seen that not only are they not true, but actually their opposites are true, you’ll actually have a whole new world of opportunities open up to you in your marketing and business.

So what’s next?
What’s Next?
How Action Plan Marketing Can Help You

Will this article solve all your marketing challenges? Probably not, but getting to the other side of these marketing lies can open up some space for you to really explore marketing honestly and with less resistance, struggle and effort.

I recommend you read this article two or three times. Really let these ideas sink in. They will help you create a paradigm shift in your marketing, from an activity that is avoided to one that you engage in fully and that pays you big rewards.

If you are interested in learning more about the how-tos of successfully marketing your professional services, I invite you to learn more about the “More Clients Club.” This online resource contains in-depth tutorials and courses about marketing your professional services with a focus on attracting more of your ideal clients – those who pay you well and with whom you love to work.
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Included in the Club is my 7-Module Fast Track to More Clients Program and the WebSite ToolKit, plus over 60 Expert Interviews with top marketing experts, and twice monthly Live Coaching Calls.

Plus a whole lot more.

This club includes everything I’ve taught my clients for almost 30 years, and my approach can work for you as well. With over 800 members, it’s a powerful community where you’ll also get support through our Club Forum and Mastermind Groups and direct feedback and instruction from me.
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To learn more about the More Clients Club and to get a free sample of the materials in the Club, just go to this link:

http://actionplan.com/fasttrack

All the best for great marketing,

Robert Middleton

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