

## Chapter 1

### **The Goal Is to Break Out, Not Blend In**

*It s not too melodramatic to say your destiny hangs upon the impression you make.*

*- Barbara Walters*

A British journalist named Lynn Truss grew weary of the misspellings and poor punctuation she observed in grocery stores and on movie marquees. She wrote a book about the importance of using proper grammar, but anticipated it would be a tough sell because she knew most people didn't share her passion for this topic.

This was a classic POP! challenge. She had created something she believed had value, but now had to capture the attention of people who weren't particularly interested in what she had to say. Truss managed to turn her book into a best seller by giving it a title that made it a word of mouth phenomenon.

The title that launched a thousands lips is based on the punch-line to this joke: A panda walks into a bar, orders and eats a meal, pulls out a six-shooter, fires it into the air, and starts to walk out. The puzzled waiter looks at him and asks, Why? The panda throws a poorly punctuated dictionary on the table and says, I m a panda. Look it up. The waiter finds the definition and reads, Panda: Large black and white mammal, indigenous to China. Food source: eats, shoots, and leaves.

Truss title, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, catapulted her book into the international spotlight. Imagine what would have happened if she had called it *The Importance of Proper Punctuation*. That s the power of giving your idea or invention a POP! title.

POP! has three components. Let s explore each of these in a little more detail.

#### **P = Purposeful**

*Dullness won t sell your product, but neither will irrelevant brilliance. - Bill Bernbach*

Communication that features brilliant wordplay doesn't qualify for POP! status unless it does two things: accurately articulates the essence of you and your offering, and positions you positively with your target audience.

Every year a few dozen courageous companies pay big bucks (an average of \$2.5 million per 30 second slot in 2006) to advertise at the Super Bowl, the international sweepstakes of high-profile commercials. The question is, how many viewers were actually motivated to try or buy the products featured in those ads? How many even remembered the name of the product in the commercial that caused their uproarious laughter?

Most of us don t have millions to spend. We have to make sure that any advertisement we place, any introduction we give, any product we create, any cause or campaign we devote ourselves to delivers a high ROI (return on investment).

That's why the first requirement of a POP! pitch is that it's purposeful. If people are scratching their heads after we've introduced our idea or invention to them, wondering what this has to do with them, we've just wasted their time and ours.

One way to create a purposeful pitch is to place your product or business name in your slogan so it's imprinted in people's brains every time they hear or see it. For example, fill in the blank, I wish I were an \_\_\_\_\_ Wiener. Even if you haven't heard that jingle in years, you probably said, Oscar Meyer. Now that's a POP! slogan that's delivering a high ROI.

An insurance giant ensures consumers think of them every time they hear the phrase, you're in good hands with \_\_\_\_\_. Did you say, Allstate? That is a perfect example of how an effective POP! slogan can accomplish its purpose every time it's said or read.

### **O = Original**

*You've got to be a good date for the reader. - Kurt Vonnegut*

It's almost a given that no matter what you're saying or selling, you're one of many. You're one of many delis, dentists, department stores, or dog walkers. One of many booths at a trade show. One of many applicants applying for a job. One of many organizations competing for your customers business. What is it about you that distinguishes you from your competition?

One way to distinguish yourself (and be a good date for decision makers) is to be original and to offer something unlike anyone or anything else. Instead of competing in a crowded niche, create your own. When you're one-of-a-kind, there is not competition. If you want to take dance classes and you scan *The Yellow Pages*, you'll see dozens of options that look much the same. But there's only one studio called *FLOOR PLAY*, and that original name may be just enough incentive for you to try them first.

People are yearning for something fresh. They welcome novelty and are delighted when we pleasantly surprise them with an uncommon approach. You may think, that's hard to do because there's nothing new under the sun.

Sure there is.

Originality is alive and well. Spencer Koppel, a self-confessed nerd, realized that techies and pocket-protector types are a breed of their own. He decided to develop a Web site and online social network so they could meet kindred souls who share their interests. The online personal ads don't feature romantic descriptions of drinking pina colodas while strolling along the beach, and they don't feature photos because Koppel says, Geeks don't care about that. They do feature tongue-in-cheek profiles such as Tall, Dork, and Handsome. What did Koppel call his site? *Geek 2 Geek* ([www.gk2gk.com](http://www.gk2gk.com)).

Did that name bring a smile to your face? When we see or hear something original, we find it appealing. That product or business is no longer inanimate or boring. Instead of

dismissing it, we're compelled to try it. If we have a good experience, we're motivated to tell other people about it. We become word-of-mouth ambassadors who build buzz for our object of affection. All this happened because the creator invested the thought-time and brainpower to give his invention an intriguing name that helped it POP! out.

The Society of Young Jewish Professionals in Washington, DC wanted their annual holiday party to break out of the dozens scheduled during December. Instead of being content to call it something mundane, the organizing committee put their heads together and came up with a catchy name that helped it become a huge success. How huge? *USA Today* called their dance (which is open to people of all nationalities, races, and backgrounds) the No. 1 holiday party in the nation.

So what is the original moniker that made this a must-attend event? *Matzo Ball*.

### **P = Pithy**

*No sinner was ever saved . . . after the first twenty minutes of the sermon. - Mark Twain*

The word pithy, which means concise and precise, may not sound very eloquent, but it's an important part of POP! communication.

The human brain can only hold approximately seven bits of information in short-term memory. If our description of our offering is longer than seven words, chances are, people won't be able to remember it. And if they don't remember what we said, our effort to obtain their attention, support, and money for our offering has failed.

The top slogans of the 20th century, as selected by *Advertising Age* magazine, are all less than seven words, proving that, when it comes to pitching, brevity is the soul of success.

- "Diamonds are forever." (De Beers)
- "Just do it." (Nike)
- Breakfast of Champions. (Wheaties)
- "We try harder." (Avis)
- "Where's the beef?" (Wendy's)

Comedian Steven Wright said, My grandfather invented Cliff Notes in 1912. He thought of it. . . Well, to make a long story short.

When people ask, What do you do? or Why should I buy this? it's your job to make a long story short. It is your responsibility to give a clear, concise, and compelling description of what you have to offer. In Chapter 5, you'll learn how to condense a complex explanation into a Tell n Sell sentence that Cliff Notes your pitch so people say, I want that! or Tell me more.

Want another example of the power of pithy communication? Nordstrom Department Store understood that having a two hundred page manual outlining all its rules and regulations regarding customer service served no good purpose. Management knew that,

most of the time, those bulky binders with all the fancy mission statements, policies and procedures sit somewhere on a shelf and never get referenced.

Nordstrom condensed their entire customer service policy into one succinct sentence. This sentence is engraved on a card and distributed to all employees, who carry it with them when they're on the job. What is their policy? Use your best judgment at all times. That's it.

Not only is that a brilliant Cliff Notes example of how to make the complex concise, it has helped Nordstrom stand out in the crowd of department stores. It receives frequent positive press for its uncommon approach of entrusting employees with the autonomy to make on-the-spot, smart decisions about how to make every customer a repeat customer.

### **Test-Market Your Communication with the Jerry Maguire Rule**

*I have a photographic memory. I just haven't developed it yet. - Jonathan Winters*

You can quickly tell if you've composed a sufficiently clear, concise, and compelling POP! message. Just share it with people and see if it obeys *The Jerry Maguire Rule*. If you've seen the movie *Jerry Maguire* (starring Tom Cruise and Renee Zellweger), you may remember towards the end when Tom's character realizes he can't live without Renee's character. He bursts into her home, rushes over to her, and starts professing his love. She patiently waits for him to stop talking so she can respond, but he keeps carrying on. Finally, she can't stand it anymore and interrupts him with, Stop, just stop. You had me at hello.

You can test-market the commercial viability of your POP! communication anytime you want, for free. Just tell people your potential title, tagline, or elevator intro and watch their reaction.

If your message has them at hello, their eyes will light up. Their eyebrows will rise in a universal sign of interest. They will have a visceral response, one they don't even have to think about. They will react with a bark of laughter, an intrigued Tell me more or an enthusiastic I want it.

You can also tell if your message *loses* them at hello. They may scrunch their eyes or knit their eyebrows together, a sure sign of consternation. They may paste polite smiles on their faces or nod noncommittally. They may utter an indifferent oh or even look away because they don't know what to say. Worst of all, they won't ask for clarification. People who are confused usually won't admit it. They just move on, not understanding or caring that what we have to offer might be of interest or use to them.

After reading their reaction, ask them to repeat what you've said. *If they can't repeat it, they didn't get it.* And if they didn't get your message, you won't get their business. If they can't remember the name of your product, how will they find it on the web or in a store? If they can't describe what your company does, why would they seek out your services? If they can't articulate your cause, why would they contribute to it? If they

don't understand the gist of your proposal, why would they approve it?

In the pages ahead, you'll learn how to create Purposeful, Original, Pithy messages that give people something to talk about . . . and remember. As Jonathan Winters pointed out, most people don't have photographic memories. It's up to us to create sales sound bites that are appealing and memorable. Are you ready to learn how to do that? Onward.

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