

The Power of Simple: How Less is More

By Roy Herr

In 2005 General Mills® was looking for a way to rejuvenate Hamburger Helper®, a popular food brand that had gone into a sales slump. As part of their market research, they visited the homes of moms who regularly used Hamburger Helper. After observing and talking with the moms, General Mills found a solution that worked, and by the end of the fiscal year, sales were up 11%.

What did General Mills do? Part of their solution was simplifying their product line. You see, Hamburger Helper pasta was available in eleven different shapes and over thirty different flavors! But all those options were actually hurting their sales, not boosting them.

General Mills discovered that regular users of Hamburger Helper liked predictability. They didn't want to try new flavors. Multiple shelves of different flavors were actually an inconvenience, making harried moms even more harried as they hunted for the right box of their familiar favorite.

If it's done right, simplicity means less is more.

This case study is a great example of the importance of simplicity in marketing. Complexity creates clutter and confusion for customers. Simplicity sells stuff.

That's correct! If it's done right, simplicity means less is more. This concept may explain why the world is attracted to plain and simple people of Anabaptist heritage who live out their faith in "simplicity and godly

sincerity."¹ For those looking on from a complex world deceived by sin, the peace, joy, and contentment of those living "the simplicity that is in Christ"² can be very attractive.

So, how can we put this amazing concept into shoe leather? Let's examine some areas you can implement simplicity in your business.

Simplify your messaging

Clear messaging is the very heart and soul of effective marketing. Your message needs to be thoughtfully reduced until it is engaging, potent and can be intuitively grasped or completely understood in a few moments.

Simple messaging may not be what you think. It certainly doesn't mean using only one-syllable words as if your prospects are all first graders. Rather, simplifying your message is the exercise of condensing it.

Coca-Cola's® tagline for several years was "Open Happiness." You could say that practically, this short, sweet phrase doesn't make sense, but even a youngster connects with the message. It is much more effective than this straightforward statement: "Remove the cap and take a drink that tastes great and makes you feel good."

"Open Happiness" says the same thing (and more) in a

¹ 2 Corinthians 1:12 "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."

² 2 Corinthians 11:3 "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

simple, appealing way. It is quickly readable, evokes the imagination, and optimistically urges you to go ahead and crack one open.

We sometimes complicate our message by using jargon or industry terms, not realizing it doesn't connect with potential customers. In your marketing materials, you might be unwittingly using insider language—terms that make sense to you as an expert, but that mean nothing to the average customer. You will connect better with prospects if you can communicate in simple, direct language.

How would you rate this tagline for an online marketing company? "Increasing click-throughs and conversion rates for successful e-commerce." Got it? It took me a while too. Try this tagline that says the same thing in language we can easily grasp: "Online ads that work." Which ad would be more likely to get you to pick up the phone and call the company?

Use simple illustrations and stories to communicate points. Don't get long-winded. Simplify the problem rather than getting into all the complexities of it. Leave out unrelated details. After you've presented the basic problem, you can present your solution (your simple solution, of course!).

Simplicity is much easier when the focus is on the emotional result rather than the technical result.

Simplicity is much easier when the focus is on the emotional result rather than the technical result. Think about the Coca-Cola example. "Remove the cap and take a drink that tastes great and makes you feel good" is written in technical language. As we glance over this line, our mind tells us: "Unimportant, boring detail." "Open Happiness," on the other hand, is a promise of satisfaction. People connect with that!

Simplify the sales process

Do you make your customers jump through several hoops before they can purchase? At one store, the salesmen on the floor took customers' information, but there was no process in place to pass it along. Customers needed to repeat their address and contact information again to a clerk when they made a purchase.

This kind of long and complicated process is exactly the opposite of simple. It sends a subtle message to customers that you certainly do not want to send: "We don't care enough about you to make this easy for you."

On your website or brochure, consider listing the steps in the buying process to make it clear and straightforward for the customer. This is the customer's map that tells them in advance what to expect as they complete their purchase. They will love you for that.

Simplify your pricing structure

When it comes to the way we price our products and services, "simple" means that customers can quickly see or calculate prices. Of course, your price should be clearly listed, but simplicity goes beyond just posting the price. Suppose your product has an array of options. You have carefully done your homework and priced each one, like this:

- Custom color: \$8.63
- Custom length: \$5.20
- Padded handles: \$9.50
- Next day delivery: \$12.50

Unfortunately, a confusing list of option and prices clutters your sales page, and can actually turn customers away. Though it may be a subconscious reaction, it's a bother to them to figure it all out.

What if you were to roll out with a new, condensed pricing strategy: "Add any option for \$9.99 each?" This leverages the power of simplicity, reducing the amount of time and energy customers need to spend thinking through decisions. Plus, you'll spend a lot less time itemizing the order!

Simplify the options you offer

By now you might be thinking that we think people called “customers” are not too bright, and the only thing we have in mind is to dumb things down for them. Not so!

The average consumer today is wading through a life of busyness and distractions. Simplicity clears a path through the jungle for them, connects better with their needs or emotions, and makes it easier for them to decide to purchase your product or service.

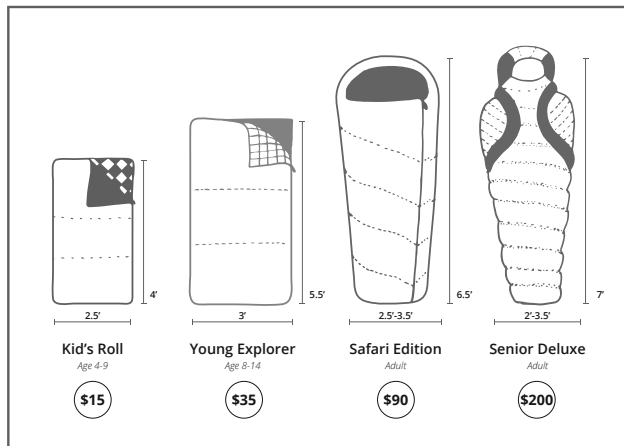
Successful marketers carefully consider their typical customer’s needs and create easy pathways that help them quickly envision their options and key decision factors.

For example, if you have several models of log splitters for sale, present recommendations for which one would work best for particular situations. Is one a homeowner’s model?

Another a semi-pro model for the serious weekender? And yet another the commercial, heavyweight edition for the Paul Bunyan type?

Or let’s say you are selling sleeping bags. You could categorize them like this:

- Kid’s roll
- Young explorer
- Safari edition
- Senior deluxe



Then with each category, you would list a few features along with the price and any recommendations for age level, size, or temperature suitability. This simplified approach helps customers quickly get the big picture

and zero in which sleeping bag would work best for them—a dad buying a sleeping bag for his son’s birthday will probably want the Young Explorer bag, not the top-of-line Safari edition.

In this section, we’ve talked about creating categories, which is a form of organization. Organization has a lot to do with simplicity. It’s simple to find an item in your desk if the drawers are neatly organized. Looking up a word in the dictionary is simple because the words are organized in alphabetical order. Imagine the complexity of finding words if they were listed randomly!

Here are some guidelines to help tame the options you offer into organized categories as you develop how you will present your company or marketing campaign to the marketplace:

1. Gather everything you want to sell, so you have a big picture of the scope you are working with.
2. Group similar products together for comparison.
3. Then, put them in logical order.
4. Next, clearly identify each product image.
5. Create charts or other visuals to organize large bodies of information (i.e. product comparisons, technical data).
6. Now it’s time to condense: If you find yourself saying, “The options are unlimited,” limit the options, until the options you offer are highly defined and motivating.
7. Next, rethink your products or services from the customer’s viewpoint and see if it is possible to configure popular combinations for your customers to choose from.
8. Create clear choices to be made—buyers like to know what they should do next.
9. Finally, decide how much product information should be included for each stage of customer interaction. For example: A catalog for a furniture manufacturer may list only overall dimensions and finish options. However, a dealer manual that includes many more measurements such as drawer size, distance between braces, legs, shipping weights, boxed sizes and drop ship

pricing, etc. may be valuable as the customer's interest increases. Too much information will overwhelm the average consumer wanting a simple overview at the beginning of the sales process, but would be great for the salesperson to have access to as detailed questions are asked near the end of the sale.

Simplify your goals

Simplicity begins with a singular purpose. Do you have a definitive, single purpose for your business? How about each of your marketing campaigns? And each piece or component of each campaign?

Clearly define the purpose before you commit dollars to a marketing project. Decide how you will know if this marketing investment worked.

Simple goals are important—as the saying goes, “The man who chases two rabbits catches none.”

Simple can be difficult!

As you can see from the examples in this article, simple doesn't mean easy. Working to simplify your messaging takes work. Simplifying your sales process and pricing structure requires doing your homework thoroughly. Organizing your products into categories takes thought. Simple goals require trimming away anything that is irrelevant.

Simple isn't easy, but it is powerful. Steve Jobs said, “Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

What part of your marketing needs simplification? Take some time this week to strip away all the fluff or all the complexity and get to the simple heart of it. Your hard work will make it easier for customers to connect with you and choose your company over the confusing competition. ✍️

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