

How to Become an “Overnight Authority” In the Eyes of Prospects and Customers.

By Geoffery Moore

“If they only knew.”

Do you ever find yourself saying this about your target audience?

“If they only knew how good we are, how hard we work.”

“If they only knew what we do that our competitors don’t do.”

“If they only knew that we can do just as good a job as larger, more well-known, more expensive companies.”

But the problem is, they don’t know. We have a saying in marketing: *perception is reality*. If your prospects don’t know how good you are...well, to them, it doesn’t matter, does it?

So what can you do about that? How can you change that perception?

Think how much easier it would be to build your business if you could somehow become instantly more known, more respect, more famous to your target audience—if you could become an overnight authority in their eyes.

Well, maybe you can.

That’s precisely the challenge we faced with Hodess Building Company, a commercial construction company in Massachusetts.

The owner told me, “I’m tired of not being invited to bid on some of these projects that we could do! All the bigger, better-known companies get invited to bid, and we often get passed over—not because we don’t have the experience and expertise to do the job, but because we’re not as well known. I’ve seen building projects come up in my own town—projects that are perfect for us—but we didn’t even get to bid on them!”

Hodess had a list of 200 key prospects, people whose job it was to pick building contractors for big commercial construction projects. They wanted to become “more famous” in the minds of these individuals, so that they would be invited to bid on more jobs.

So I told Hodess: “The goal should be not only to get these prospects to know the name Hodess, but to also to get them to think of Hodess as an expert, an authority. And the key for doing that is right there in the word *authority*. It’s the word *author*. Nothing establishes a sense of authority like being the author of a book. So I recommended that Hodess write a book on *how to pick a building contractor* and send it to all 200 prospects.”

I suggested that we name the book:

**Straight Answers to the 20 Questions
Building Contractors Hope You’ll Never Ask**

I told the owner, “This book will establish Hodess as the authority on giving straight answers on building projects. We’ll make sure the book has all the tough questions that decision-makers would want to ask a building contractor. And we’ll also make sure it has your answers in a very straightforward, tell-it-like-it-is style.”

The owner said, “I like the idea, but it’ll take a long time to write a book. I need business now!”

I said, “No problem. We are going to begin changing perceptions almost immediately. *And we’ll do that by inviting every one of your prospects to be interviewed for the book.* It’s not every day a person gets invited to be interviewed for a book, so this mailing will definitely get their attention. And it will get Hodess perceived as an author and an authority *even before a word of the book has been written.*”

So that’s what we did. We sent every key prospect a large envelope labeled, Book Contributor Package. Inside there was a personal letter from Blake, explaining the idea of the book, and inviting them to be interviewed for it. He told them, “To thank you for your interview, we’ll send you a free copy of the book when it is published.”

The mailing also included a flyer that showed the cover of the book and described the concept. Now think about what this does for Hodess. With a single mailing, all of these

prospects are already being impressed with the fact that Hodess is writing the book on how to give straight answers—and not one word of the book had been written yet!

Even though the book didn't yet exist, we were already using it as a *strategic marketing tool to create a powerful impression and make Hodess instantly larger in the minds of these 200 prospects*. (By the way, on the back of this flyer we gave some information about some of the buildings Hodess had built, as a way of providing credentials.)

We could have just sent these prospects a typical sales brochure. But think how much more impact we got by sending them an invitation to be interviewed for a book!

More prospects are going to open a mail package like this. More are going to actually look it over and pay attention to it. More are going to respond to it and remember it.

And, even though the mail package is not directly “selling” Hodess Building Company, it is conveying a very positive, very powerful impression about Hodess. It's making the name Hodess instantly larger in their minds. It's selling without selling.

We sent the invitation mailing, and two things happened right away. First, the president of Hodess got to have long phone interviews with more than three dozen key prospects. Some of these conversations lasted forty-five minutes, and there was no sales pressure, no sales resistance, no discomfort. In fact, the prospects enjoyed being interviewed. Imagine that! *What would it be worth to you to be able to have dozens of long, highly involved, no-pressure conversations with your best prospects?*

Second, we kept mailing to all of these prospects month after month, sending them excerpts of the book as we were working on it, asking them what they thought. In this way, we continued to involve all of prospects in this ongoing project for over a year.

We taped all the phone interviews and had them transcribed. This provided the grist I needed to write the book. But we actually didn't care how long it took to produce the book because we were using the idea to get in front of prospects every month and to continually remind them to think of Hodess as an authority.

A Strategic Marketing Tool with Multiple Benefits

I want to emphasize again that *the book was designed to be used as a strategic marketing tool*. We didn't really care if people bought the book or not. If they did, that would be a bonus. And, though we hoped people would read it, even that wasn't the main

objective. We were primarily using the book as a marketing object to make Hodess “famous” in the minds of 200 individuals.

But that was just the beginning. Because, in fact, the book offered Hodess a number of other strategic marketing benefits.

OFFICE PRESENCE. Once the book was finished, we sent a free copy to all prospects. Furthermore, all of those who were interviewed were quoted inside, and we told them where to find their own quote in the book. So the book gave Hodess a presence in these offices, reminding people of the Hodess name.

TIMELY. When a building project comes up, many of these decision-makers would likely consult the book and bring it to a meeting to make sure they are asking the right questions and getting the right answers. And in the process, someone would be apt to say, “Maybe we should also invite the guys who wrote the book to bid on this.”

PASS-ALONG VALUE. The book has great pass-along value. It’s a very impressive networking tool that Hodess’ business development people can use—much better than just handing out business cards.

SURROGATE SALESPERSON. The book also functions as a surrogate salesperson. Hodess can send the book to anyone who is interested in their company. And people might very well sit down and read it for an hour or two, even though they would never listen to a sales rep for an hour or two. And while they are reading it, they will be getting a very positive impression of Hodess. Even if they only glance through the book, they will still be getting a very powerful impression of Hodess.

TIPPING POWER. If a bid comes down to Hodess and one other company that has the same experience and expertise, there’s a good chance some companies will want to go with the company that “wrote the book.” People like to feel they are dealing with the authority, the guy who has the answers. So the book has the potential to help tip a project Hodess’ way at the crucial moment of decision.

FREE PR. A book like this provides many opportunities for free PR. You can excerpt chapters of it for an article in a publication. You can be interviewed as the author, and so forth.

LONG SHELF LIFE. And a book as marketing tool has a shelf life of several years. You can even bring out new editions.

We created this book several years ago, and just recently I talked with the president and asked him how it was going. Here's what he said. "I will never go to another meeting without several copies of the book. Last week I was in a meeting with a large company in New Jersey, and I took two copies of the book and handed them out. While I was there, several other Merck employees looked at the book and asked if I could send them a copy. Then, when I got back to my office, there was a message on my answering machine from Merck asking for even more copies!"

Should you become an author?

If you're serious about changing the way you are perceived by your prospects and customers—if you see the value in becoming an overnight "famous authority" in their eyes—consider becoming an author.

The key is to first find a topic that fits your expertise, something in which you can legitimately position yourself as an authority. And second, choose a topic of real interest and relevance to your prospects.

And then tell them what you're working on, invite them to be interviewed, keep them involved in the process of creating whatever it is you're creating. This will give you a way to have multiple positive contacts with prospects and customers, making positive impressions over time.

Of course, I realize that some people have objections to this idea, so let me respond to some of the more common ones.

Some business owners see a book as an exercise in ego—and they are hesitant to do it for that reason. But that's not really what the book idea is about. The book just gives you a tool that helps build your reputation, build trust, and educate people more fully about what you know, and what you stand for as a business. Authoring a book is a concrete way of demonstrating to the world, "Here is what we as a business stand for." It's not just an ego exercise.

Some people say, "But I don't know how to write." The president of Hodess was not a writer, as he himself admitted. But he knew how to have a phone conversation. And, as I mentioned, we taped these conversations and transcribed them, and this became the basis for the writing of the book. Yes, you may need a ghost writer to help. (I did all the writing for the Hodess book.) But you don't have to be a good writer yourself.

Finally, some will say, “I don’t think many people will want to buy our book or read it.” And as I said before, that’s not really the main point of the book. *It’s a marketing tool, period!* Of course, it should be well-written, helpful, and interesting. And if you want to, you can list it on Amazon for sale. But the real point of the book is to function as a strategic marketing tool—just like a series of ads or TV spots. And as such, the very existence of the book makes a strong statement about you and your business—even to those who don’t bother to read it.

Yes, it is a big undertaking, just as building a business is a big undertaking. But if you think about the many benefits a book project can bring to your business, month after month and year after year, you may find that it’s well worth the effort.

If you think a book project might be right for your business—or if you have some other marketing need or question—call Geoffery Moore at 1-603-353-4700. Or send an email to bullseye@YourBestMarketingMove.com. Geoffery will give you a free consultation to help determine your best marketing move.

This free report has been adapted from Geoffery Moore’s e-book, *Think Like a Customer to Market Like a Genius*, © 2010, Geoffery Moore Marketing. The book is available for sale at www.YourBestMarketingMove.com.