

Marketing Your System[®]

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

Is your SUV Trail Rated? This is what Jeep's most recent marketing campaign has all existing and potential SUV owners asking. It's also a brilliant marketing move on Jeep's part. Why? Because "Trail Rated" is simply an internal rating system Jeep uses, but by marketing it as the "standard" rating system for all SUVs, they have quickly established the precedent. Now, all SUV manufacturers will be scrambling to achieve their own system, then eventually an outside firm such as JD Power will step in and create an "objective" system for all to be compared against. But, until that time (and actually for some time afterward), Jeep owns the "standard" in the industry (and in the minds of all potential SUV owners) and will be the benchmark by which others are compared. Brilliant!

Out of sheer need (or perhaps desperation), many businesses have developed systems to enhance their products or services or their delivery of these products or services. Sometimes these systems spin off to become businesses of their own. American Airlines did it with their SABRE reservation system — this system actually generates more revenue than the airline itself.

Your system might not be a candidate for a separate revenue stream, but it could become a key marketing tool that can immediately and powerfully distinguish you from your competitors.

Identifying your system: So tell me, what makes you so special? This is a very challenging question to answer. It's human nature not to brag on oneself, but it is extremely important to understand what makes you different, special, unique, etc.

Tip from The Business Lab: With your team, list out all the things that make you special. Here are some ideas to help get you started:

- What things have your clients thanked you for recently? Why? Why did you do what you did better than another could? What system do you have in place that allowed this particular transaction to go so smoothly that the client bothered to say thank you?
- What elements have you incorporated into your product, service, or delivery method as a result of trying to streamline the activity and/or noticing what clients were doing or saying? When the waiter at Perry's Grille in The Woodlands handed me my credit card recently, my copy of the receipt was wrapped around my card, and the restaurant's copy was attached to the pen. Now this was a very subtle action but one that got my attention. It would appear as if Perry's (or at least the waiter) has noticed the client's confusion when two receipts are brought back together. A nice touch!

- What formal processes do you have in place that you might be able to market? With Jeep, they have a criteria checklist that their vehicles must pass in order to be sold. They took this checklist and named it "Trail Rated." What checklists do you have and how can you effectively brand them? Al Ross of Houston-based National Signs does this with his Raising the Bar Process. All projects at National Signs go through a specific quality control process from start to finish. They've perfected this system to such a degree that they are now branding it as "Raising the Bar." Al even commissioned a logo to show their pride and is using it as an internal motivator as well.

- Is there anything you do that is highly unique to your industry? We saw Budweiser do this with their Born On Date. They've probably been putting the date on their beer for a long time (or at least keeping some type of record of this), but by recognizing this procedure as a differentiator, they were able to market this unique little activity.

- What really closes business for you? Even if it is something that isn't unique to your company, you might be able to market it successfully — especially if your competitors are not. Maybe it's you! If so, this can be a great marketing tool. A message such as: "With our company you get x and y and z, but more importantly, you get ME!" Here you could go on to tell them in a personal note fashion how you are going to take care of them just as you have these other clients (with client testimonials, photos of you and your happy clients, etc.).

Tip from The Business Lab: One of the most effective ways to find out all the special things you really are doing is to have your company shopped (as well as your competitors) by a professional shopping service and/or ask an outside copywriter to come in an interview you, your team, and your clients. With this information, a writer can help you craft the Story of You and with this information, you can create an important marketing message and collateral items. Having your clients interviewed by a professional writer can be very powerful and insightful. You just might be surprised what you learn.

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our website at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-374-0569.

Author's Note: Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, websites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share our FREE newsletter with you to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques, and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX, at 281-374-0170 or by E-mail at kathy@thebusinesslab.com