THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY MINDS

ACTION DOCUMENT
for Panel 2

Using Brain Based Marketing to Engineer "Irrefusable Offers"

"Expertise is only as good as the actions you take with them. In this program, we've gotten you world-class experts. We've tried to get you world-class interpretations that we are moving mountains to share with you. What you do with it is up to you."

Jay Abraham & Rich Schefren

Panel 1: Using Brain Based Marketing to Engineer "Irrefusable Offers"

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How the ideas from this panel get translated into business growth

This action document is designed to help you increase your credibility and the trust of your target market. We have synthesized the key points from the panel discussion into ten specific actions you can take to use trust and credibility for business growth.

League of Extraordinary Minds
Action Document

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Getting in Front of Your Customers

Host Focus Groups........ 1
Conduct One-on-One Interviews........ 5
Set Up Online Interfaces with Customers........ 7

II. Tuning in to WIIFM

Find Your Customers' Pain Points. 8
Take Away the Pain Points with Your Benefits........ 10
Create Contrast with Case Studies........ 11

III. "Brain-Basing" Your Marketing Materials

Edit Your Marketing Copy........ 13
Revise Your Website........ 15
Revise Your Presentations........ 17
Revise Other Collaterals........ 19

I. Getting in Front of Your Customers

Host Focus Groups

A focus group can give you a range of insights into your business, including the viability of your products and services, perceptions related to your company's brand, and the effectiveness of your marketing communications.

1. Identifying and Communicating with Your Participants

- ☐ Identify the objective of the session. Keep in mind that the key to a focus group is in its name: focus. You need to concentrate on just one objective and facilitate the discussion around it.

- ☐ Based on the session objective, identify a list of participant candidates from your customer database. Focus groups are usually comprised of five to eight members who have something in common (e.g., similar age group, company position, user of a particular product). Have an "alternate list" of invitees that you can use if you receive declines from your first round. Also, select members who are likely to be participative and reflective. If at all possible, select members who don't know each other.

- ☐ Contact the potential members you have identified and invite them to the session.

- ☐ Send the people who have accepted your invitation a session agenda (including time, location, and any directions needed to make arrival easy), and a list of questions that the group will discuss.

- ☐ Plan to provide a copy of the session results report to each participant; let them know you will do this.

- ☐ If you need participants to sign a non-disclosure agreement or other form (e.g. waiver or informed consent), collect the signed documents prior to the day of the session.

- ☐ Two or three days before the session, call and/or email each member with a reminder; resend the directions and agenda, along with any additional information that will be useful to them.

2. Planning the Session

- ☐ Timing and duration: Session duration should not exceed 1.5 hours. Schedule the session for a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Setting it for lunch time (and providing the meal) may make it easier to confirm participants.

- ☐ Setting: Use a closed conference room that has adequate air flow and lighting and a low noise level. If you are using a hotel conference room, make sure it is not adjacent to a busy location such as a kitchen, or that there won't be another function adjacent to the room that could disrupt your session.

- ☐ Refreshments: Provide some form of refreshment (coffee/tea, juices, sodas, along with finger foods) even if you are not schedule around a meal time. If your session will take place first thing in the morning or at lunch time, provide an appropriate meal. Use buffet-style serving and make sure everyone has gotten their food before beginning the session. (Note: if you are scheduling during a meal, add at least an extra half-hour to the duration that you give the participants so that you don't cut into the time needed for the session itself.)

- ☐ Session set up: Set chairs so that all members can see each other. If you are using tables, put them in a round or horseshoe configuration. Provide name tags for participants. Supply an additional agenda copy along with paper and pen/pencil for each participant.

- ☐ Ground rules/norms: Have ground rules that sustain participation and allow the facilitator to keep the group focused. For example, limit response time to two minutes per participant per question; allow the speaker to finish before speaking.

- ☐ Agenda: Prepare an agenda (e.g. welcome, review of agenda, session objectives, ground rules, introductions, session questions/answers/ discussion, wrap up). Assign time duration to each agenda element so that you can manage the session effectively (Recommendation: To avoid unnecessary distraction, do not include these timings on the participants' copy of the agenda.)

- ☐ Recording: Record the session (audio or video). Let the participants know you will be recording.

3. Tips for Developing Questions

- ☐ Create no more than five or six questions. This is the maximum number of questions that can be effectively discussed in 1.5 hours.
- ☐ Make questions open-ended. That is, avoid yes/no questions.
- ☐ Keep questions neutral. Avoid wording that might influence answers.
- ☐ Make sure that questions are clearly worded and unambiguous.
- ☐ Avoid "why" questions. This type of question can make participants feel defensive and can turn the discussion into a debate.
- ☐ When you have your questions drafted, test them against your objective. Will the answers give you the information you are looking for? Edit as needed to arrive at the best set of questions for your purpose.

4. Facilitating the Session

- ☐ The role of the facilitator is to manage the agenda, keep discussion flowing constructively, and ensure that the objective of the session is met.
- ☐ During the question/answer portion of the agenda, deliver each question in a neutral tone and allow participants a few minutes to make notes. Then, request each member to respond and facilitate discussion as needed.
- ☐ Remain neutral in facial expression and in tone. This is important.
- ☐ Refrain from rushing through the answers. Allow pauses in the discussion.

- ☐ Ensure even participation. If one or two people are dominating the meeting, make a point of calling on others. You might be able to prevent this by using a round-table approach, going in one direction around group and giving each person an opportunity to answer the question.

- ☐ At the conclusion of the session, thank the participants and let them know they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers.

5. Post-Session Tasks

- ☐ Review the audio or video recording. Consider having the session transcribed.

- ☐ Analyze the session results and compile a report. The simplest format for the report is 1) list the question asked, 2) summarize each participant's response, 3) summarize any discussion that ensured, and 4) draw conclusions or make recommendations based on the responses. You may want to include an overall summary of the session that includes recommendations.

- ☐ Send thank-you notes and/or gifts to participants to acknowledge them for taking the time to take part in the session.

Conduct One-on-One Interviews

Talking to customers in a one-on-one setting can elicit information that might not be obtainable in a group session. Depending on your objectives, consider including private customer interviews in your information gathering initiatives.

- ☐ Identify the objective of the interview. What information do you want to gather? For what purpose?

- ☐ Based on the interview objective, identify a list of candidate interviewees from your customer database.

- ☐ Create a list of interview questions to use as guidelines for the interviews.

- ☐ Plan interview duration of no more than an hour. Take less time if possible.

- ☐ Contact the candidates you have identified and invite them to be interviewed.

- ☐ Plan to hold the interview in a location with no distractions. If it will take place at the interviewee's location, request that you meet in a closed room.

- ☐ Handle the logistics with the individuals who accept (date, time, location).

- ☐ Obtain a signed non-disclosure agreement from each interviewee (if needed).

- ☐ Two or three days prior to the interview appointment, send a reminder (with date/time/location) and a copy of the questions that will be asked.

- ☐ Use a video or audio recorder for the interview (check that it's working prior to the start). In addition to recording, take notes as a backup in case something goes wrong with the equipment.

- ☐ Start the interview by setting expectations. Explain the type of interview you are conducting and its nature. If you want them to ask questions, let them know how you would like to receive them (i.e., ask questions come up or wait until the end of the interview). Let them know how long the interview should take. Let them know how they can contact you after the interview if they want to get in touch after the fact. Ask if they have any questions before you get started.

- ☐ As with the focus group sessions, ask open-ended questions. Keeping your objective in mind, facilitate the conversation using your questions as guidelines. Don't worry about adhering absolutely to the question list; something unexpected may come up that you want to pursue, and you might miss this if you are worried about "sticking to the script."

- ☐ After the interview takes place, send a note and/or gift to acknowledge the person's participation.

- ☐ Review the interview recording. Consider having the session transcribed.

- ☐ Summarize the results of the interview in the context of your objective. If you are conducting a number of private interviews for the same initiative, combine the results and compile a summary report that outlines key information gathered and recommendations based on interviewee input.

Set Up Online Interfaces with Customers

1. You can conduct focus groups and individual interviews online or by telephone.

   - ☐ Use a service such as FreeConferenceCall.com (www.freeconferencecall.com), GotoMeeting (www.gotomeeting.com) or Maestroconference (www.maestroconference.com) to conduct focus groups; you can poll participants and use chat functions. With Maestroconference, you can form breakout groups. Make sure you use a service that will record your sessions (all three of the services mentioned above do so). If you use a teleconference system that doesn't have an associated online visual interface, you can use a service such as Glance.net (www.glance.net) to provide visuals.

   - ☐ Follow the same procedures and guidelines as those listed above for focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

2. You can set up other "channels" to encourage customers to provide feedback, insights, and suggestions. Keep in mind, however, that those who take the time to communicate with you may not necessarily represent the majority of your market or customer base. If you receive input from one of these channels that you want to pursue, consider moving the topic into a focus group or interview initiative.

   Channels that you can create to encourage customer input include:

   - ☐ Blogs: Set up a blog specifically for customer response and input, or include posts on an existing blog that request response.
   - ☐ Email campaigns: Create campaigns that solicit customer input.
   - ☐ Surveys: Invite customers to complete and submit online surveys (see the Panel 1 action guide for information about creating surveys).
   - ☐ Communities: Set up an online customer community that offers value as well as a forum for communication between members and with you.
   - ☐ Social Media: Use Facebook or LinkedIn to reach out to customers in a social media context.
   - ☐ Twitter: Build a following of customers on Twitter and dialog with them. Request feedback directly or point them to your blogs, surveys, etc.

II. Tuning in to WIIFM ("What's In It for Me?")

Find Your Customers' Pain Points

It was noted in this panel that people are more responsive to solutions that alleviate problems than to those that move them toward a goal. Knowing your market's "pain points" will help you communicate and influence prospects more effectively.

A pain point is a key ingredient in a selection decision. We get food when we are hungry. We put on a sweater when we are chilly. We grab an adhesive bandage when we cut a finger.

Your customers and prospects buy from you to handle pain. Some "pains" may be easily identified, others not so much.

1. Use focus groups and interviews as discussed above to uncover pain points. The information you want to find out in the sessions is around customer buying motivation. In what situations and at what times do they seek and/or buy your products or services? What are the most important needs that motivate their purchase?

2. Gather information about your market's pain points by a key word qualifier search. Key word qualifiers modify a primary key word. In this case, you are looking for qualifiers that imply a need or pain point. For example, the primary key word you are interested might be "cake," and you want to get a sense of what pain points people are trying to ease by searching for solutions on the Internet. You can see what is being searched for an in what numbers by using the qualifier "how to."

    - ☐ Go into the key word search tool of your choice (like www.wordtracker.com or www.google.com/sktool).
    - ☐ Enter your keyword and your qualifier, separated by commas. Submit this request.
    - ☐ You will get a list of searches using one or both terms, along with the number of searches for each over the past month.

- ☐ You will likely need to try more than one qualifier to get the most useful information. Depending on your primary word, consider qualifiers such as:

    - how to
    - learn
    - make
    - do it yourself
    - diy
    - build
    - remedy
    - problems
    - solution
    - cure
    - questions

- ☐ Gaining insight into what people are searching for on the Internet that relate to your products or services will give you an idea what problems they are trying to solve.

Between direct conversation with customers (through focus groups and/or interviews) and indirect research through the internet, you should be able to generate a list of pain points that characterize your market. This is a good beginning to brain-basing your marketing and messaging.

Notice that this is a *beginning*. One of the biggest traps that business owners fall into when conducting market research is the “false consensus effect.” This is the tendency to assume that one’s opinions, or the opinions of a small group of individuals, represent a population as a whole.

It is unlikely that the exercises above will capture a statistically valid set of results. That’s okay. Few business owners can devote the resources needed for statistical validity in their research. The key here is to use the initial information you gather and continue to test. Use focus groups with different characteristics, change up your surveys and use different avenues to invite participation in them, go back to the key word and qualifier searches on a periodic basis. This way, you can ensure that you don’t end up targeting a much smaller portion of your market than you should be.

Take Away the Pain with Your Benefits

With your pan point list in hand, it's time to brainstorm about how your offerings take away the pain. Understanding the benefits of your products and services in the context of your market's most pressing problems will help you create brain-based communications that will increase your influence with prospects and customers.

Use the table below as a template for your brainstorming. If you have multiple offerings (products and/or services) use a separate table for each offering.

- ☐ List each pain point in the left hand column.
- ☐ How does your offering address/cure/solve each pain point? Think through and record your answers to the question in the next column.
- ☐ What specific benefits are gained by your customer? These benefits should tie to the pain point and demonstrate a solution. List these benefits in the last column.

Pain Point/Benefit List for [insert offering here]		
Pain point	**How the offering addresses pain point**	**Benefits**
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•
		•

Create Contrast with Case Studies

Case studies are among the most popular tools for communicating the benefits of a product or service. Borrowed from the science and academic communities, case studies tell true stories about the results of applying a particular solution to a particular problem.

Unfortunately, many marketing case studies have not traveled far from their scientific roots. They are dry, full of buzz words or corporatespeak, and don't convey the real value of a solution from the viewpoint of the customer or prospect. As a result, these studies fail to influence as they are meant to.

In terms of brain-based marketing, a case study is an excellent way to create contrast. It is a "before-after" story that shows how your product or service addressed a particular client's pain and what benefit that client realized as a result.

The key word in that description is *story*. Tell a story, using the narrative guidelines discussed in the Panel 1 Action Guide. In the case of a case study, the basic story elements look like this:

- Protagonist – This is the client that the case study is about, *not your company*. Another error in many studies is making the company the hero rather than the client. Remember: **The hero is your client**.

- Antagonist – The villain of the case study is the problem that the client is experiencing. It is the situation or entity that is creating some kind of pain. This is the "before" part of the contrast.

- Conflict –The conflict in the case study is about what was happening before your company came on the scene. The client had tried this and that, to no avail. The problem got worse. The client was losing time, money, or some other valued resource and didn't know where to turn.

- Resolution – This is where you come in. You are the catalyst that enables the hero to overcome the villain and bring a resolution.

The case study should follow this basic outline:

1. Statement of problem: Where the protagonist and antagonist are introduced and the conflict is told.

2. Action for Resolution: Where the protagonist turns to you for assistance and specifically how you work together to overcome the antagonist.

3. Results: The specific outcomes of the action for resolution. This section needs to be as quantitative as possible (e.g., 30% increase in profits, 10-day reduction of days to payment of accounts receivable). If clear numbers are not available to report, use results as reported by the client (e.g., fewer complaints from employees, less computer down time). Have the person reporting qualitative results be an authority in the company (CEO, VP of Human Resources, IT Manager, etc).

4. Benefits: Again, quantitative is best. Use the list you brainstormed above and input from the client.

Interview the client that the case study will be about and, if it would be of use, interview the in-house person or team that accomplished the result being reported on. Use the guidelines above for one-on-one interviews and focus questions on the four sections of the case study outline. Record these interviews and get them transcribed; this will serve as the rough material for the story.

Keep the case study short and to the point, no more than two pages. If you produce several case studies around one offering or solution, you can repurpose the material you collected for the case study by producing a report or white paper about a problem that your market shares. Use the input you received from the interviews to include the customer's voice in the paper.

III. "Brain-Basing" Your Marketing Materials

Edit Your Marketing Copy

Consider the wording of all of your market-facing communications. Are they brain-based? Do they influence the desired buying behavior? Check your copy against the following guidelines:

- ☐ In the words of Albert Einstein, "make things as simple as possible, but no simpler." Keep your copy short and to the point. Choose simple words and phrases over complex ones.

- ☐ Avoid jargon or "insider language." You don't know who will read your copy, or who customers' influencers might be. Express your information in language that is understandable to anyone in your customers' orbit.

- ☐ Likewise, delete acronyms. If at all possible, don't even "define" an acronym and then use it. Just leave the abbreviations out entirely.

- ☐ Kill the buzz words. Avoid words and phrasing that have become hackneyed and stereotypic. "Paradigm," "value proposition," and, yes, even "pain point" are meaningful terms on their own, but they have been so overused in business literature that they now sound robotic when included in marketing copy. Figure out what buzz words predominate in your particular market, and then avoid using them in any of your copy.

- ☐ Speak to your reader. In other words, match your conversation to your customer. Make your copy flow naturally with vernacular, tone, and phrasing that fits the culture of your customer. For example, copy with a conversational tone would be one thing for doctors as a target audience, and something quite different for an audience of computer game aficionados in the 19-24 age range.

- ☐ In any of your marketing copy, lead with the pain. That is, concentrate your writing on how your offerings will solve a problem or address an important need for your customer. Point your benefits in the same direction. Lead off with this information to capture your reader's attention and motivate them to read further.

- ☐ Remember that the brain tends to remember the first and last message in any kind of series (chapters, paragraphs, bullet points, slides, etc.). Structure your materials so that the strongest messages are at the beginning and the end.

- ☐ Review copy on a periodic basis. After you have completed a round of customer research, for example, thoroughly review your marketing collaterals. For example, are you addressing the right pain points? Do the benefits you list reflect what customers value about your offerings? Edit if needed to align with your research findings.

Revise Your Website

You can brain-base the structure and layout of your website to improve your influence with site visitors. Here are three resources that provide a lot of guidance about design that effectively influences your readers:

- ☐ *Don't Make Me Think!,* a book by Steve Krug (www.sensible.com), offers basic principles for good web design based on "usability." He covers a wide range of website design principles that adhere to the title of his book, which is also his primary design rule. He illustrates (literally) how different versions of a single site elements lead to different behaviors on the part of the visitor. Essentially, the more a visitor needs to think, the less likely they are to take the desired actions on the site.

- ☐ Jakob Nielsen, an acknowledged web usability expert, offers a range of useful information on his website (www.useit.com). His viewpoint aligns well with Krug's, highlighting clarity and ease of use as the goals of good web design.

- ☐ Web Pages That Suck (www.webpagesthatsuck.com) offers guidelines "in reverse," showcasing sites that don't work and explaining why they fall short.

All three of these resources have more useful information than can be included here, and are worth reviewing to get a better understanding of how to brain-base your site.

Here are some guidelines that align with their advice:

- ☐ Leave flash behind. Avoid using Flash on your site. Flash doesn't produce any useful action in your readers, and it can work against you with search engines.

- ☐ Use expected conventions. Web users have become accustomed to certain conventions. They expect, for example, for any hyperlinks to be noted in blue and be underlined. They look for the main menu across the top of the page and expect it to run horizontally. They look for a link to the home page from whatever page in the site they happen to be on. Make sure that your site uses expected conventions, so that the reader's attention will be on your messaging and not on navigation.

- ☐ Support the eye-brain connection. Black copy on a white background. The primary action request in the top right corner of every page. Your logo in the top left corner. These are examples of design elements that follow the eye-brain connection.

- ☐ Include white space in the design. Leave space between page elements to make it easier to read and to discern discrete sections.

- ☐ Use images along with words to convey your messages. You can obtain stock images at site such as iStockPhoto (www.istockphoto.com), Fotolia (www.fotolia.com) and Dreamstime (www.dreamstime.com).

- ☐ Let the visitor know what you want them to do. Make a request for action on every page. "Email us for more information," "Call us for an appointment," "Buy now" – whatever you want them to do, ask for the action.

Revise Your Presentations

1. Rethink Your Presentation Style

   You will be far more effective with a short, focused presentation than one that covers more material than the brain can assimilate in a limited period of time.

   There are several movements afoot that support a short, succinct presentation style:

   a. The Pecha Kucha (www.pechkucha.org) presentation style began in the architecture and design sectors. It is fast and creative format for sharing information. It calls for a total of 20 slides presented for 20 seconds per slide; total presentation time is 6 minutes, 40 seconds. The rhythm and speed of Pecha Kucha creates a memorable presentation.

   b. The Ignite (http://ignite.oreilly.com) style shortens presentation duration further. Consisting of 20 slides at 15 seconds per slide, and ignite presentation spans just five minutes.

   c. TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conferences have set guidelines about the presentations that are part of their events. One specific guideline is a time limit of 18 minutes…no more. As TED points out on its website (www.ted.com), "We've found that a carefully prepared presentation of this length can have astonishing impact."

2. Presentation Materials

   Brain-base your presentations by creating support material that supports your messages. Whether you use Powerpoint or some other presentation tool, review your materials and revise them as needed to improve their influence with your audiences.

   - ☐ One at a time. Plan your presentation so just one new point is displayed at a time. For example, rather than put all the points you will talk about up at one time (you will lose your audience as they read ahead), reveal each point as your discuss it. Bullet points can be revealed one at a time as you reach them.

- ☐ Use pictures instead of words. One picture on a slide with no words can be attention-getting, and can keep your audience's attention on what you are saying.

- ☐ If you are using words, don't use very many. Ignore the urge to write your bullet points in complete sentences. Use short phrases for your points, preferably phrases that will arouse your audience's curiosity.

- ☐ Use symbols and metaphors. Engage your audience's brains by using symbols and metaphors that align with your messaging. Your presentation will be more memorable if your audience's brains can connect your points to familiar analogies.

- ☐ Tell stories. Along with, or as part of, the symbols and metaphors, tell stories to make your points stick. Refer back to the story telling guidelines in the Panel 1 Action Guide to help you craft and include stories in your presentation.

- ☐ Rethink the standard convention of putting your logo on every slide. Your audience will remember your company if you have given them a presentation worth remembering. The brain resists repetitive advertising. Putting your logo on every page takes up valuable real estate on your slide, and doesn't contribute anything. Put your logo on the introduction page and on any pages where it makes sense.

- ☐ Separate slides from handout. One error many companies make when creating presentation materials is to have the slides used to support a presentation do double duty as handouts without any additional information. Doing this makes both the presentation material and the handouts less effective. Have the presentation materials support the speaker by using evocative and provocative images and words, and create a separate document to serve as handouts. These can include the presentation material and provide more detail for each slide.

- ☐ For more guidelines and ideas for making your presentation materials more brain-based, check out Slide Magnet (www.slidemagnet.com) and Beyond Bullet Points (www.beyondbulletpoints.com).

Revise Other Collaterals

Congruence in your marketing materials is important. When you have revised your copy, your website and your presentations to make them more brain-based and influential, it is important to align any other collaterals to match.

Review any market-facing communications your company publishes, including (but not limited to):

- ☐ Blogs. When you revise your website, don't forget about your blog! And continue to pay attention to your copy writing per the suggestions above.

- ☐ Social media pages. If you have a Facebook page (for you personally and/or for your company) or facilitate a LinkedIn group, apply any revisions in your communication approach here.

- ☐ Brochures/flyers. Bring any of your printed collaterals in line in terms of design and copy. Make sure that any revisions in your marketing messaging carry through here.

- ☐ Thought leadership pieces. Review any articles, white papers, or reports that you self-publish and edit them if needed.

- ☐ Business cards. They may be small, but they may need revising! Review the design and the information included on your business card. Do you need to add a Twitter address? Does the tag line need adjusting to align with the rest of your collaterals?

- ☐ Email signatures. As mentioned in the Panel 1 Action Guide, your email signature can be an effective marketing communication. If you are using one, make sure it aligns with your revised messaging.