

## 7 Steps to Sell Your Uniqueness

In my son's continued pursuit of college hunting, we found ourselves surrounded by nervous parents and hopeful high school seniors in a small auditorium at Columbia University in New York City.

Columbia's Information Session guide said, "I know you're visiting various colleges in order to make this important decision. By now all these universities must look alike — a bunch of dorms, a central area, cafeterias with similar food. Let me tell you what makes Columbia unique."

She then followed one of my major rules for effective speaking. She categorized her comments into three topics. (We retain data more effectively when information is related in three sections.) Within her three points, the guide told us how Columbia stands out in a competitive way from other successful colleges.

As you continue to market your dental practice internally and externally, what makes it stand out in a competitive way from other successful dental practices?

What makes you unique?

How do you communicate that uniqueness to your patients and team?

### Figuring out your uniqueness

In advertising, this quest to distinguish you from others is called branding. Companies invest large amounts of money to create and maintain their brands. To find your brand, do the following exercise described in Tom Peter's book, "Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age."

#### The brand promise exercise

❶ Who are you? Write a two-page short story about the (your name here) Dental Group telling who you are. Then distill it down to one page. Then cut it to a single paragraph. Then how about 10 or five words? Or one verb? IBM solves. Sony dreams. Benetton protests. Brands are about verbs, not nouns. Brands are action.

❷ Do a Three Ways list. List three ways you are unique to your patients. (The Columbia University host knew what she was doing.)

❸ Figure out your Dramatic Difference. Peters defines this as something you do that gives your service or product offering a dramatic difference in bottom-line success for your patients. Write down in 25 words or less your one great Dramatic Difference that distinguishes you from your competitors.

❹ Who are they? Explain who your competitors are in 25 powerful words. List three distinct us vs. them differences.

❺ Ask your favorite patients, "What makes us unique to you? What three words come to mind when you think about our work?"



**Karen Cortell Reisman, MS**

Reisman, author of "The Naked Truth About Giving Great Speeches," teaches organizations how to increase productivity by communicating effectively. She has been a visiting faculty presenter at The Pankey Institute, a speaker at dental meetings, and president of Speak for Yourself® for 14 years. To buy Reisman's book or purchase her other CDs, e-mail her at karen@speakforyourself.com. Reach Reisman at [www.SpeakForYourself.com](http://www.SpeakForYourself.com).

I called Dr. Irwin Becker after I did some presentations at The Pankey Institute and asked him these five questions. He said, "High energy with value. Learning. Help dentists be successful. Weeds out the obvious." This information has helped me formulate my brand.

### Communicating your uniqueness

Once you've discovered your brand, don't keep it a secret.

⑥ Try it on teammates. Talk about your uniqueness among your team. Discuss it at your team huddles and meetings. Argue about it. Get comfortable with it.

⑦ Try it on your patients. Test it with your friendly patients, and then share your uniqueness with everyone.

In the past, service was about serving a function. Now it's all about telling your story. As we become inundated with technology and data, the ability to connect with your patients on an emotional level by telling your story, your branding synopsis, will help your business thrive.

A great example is a Best Buy billboard. On the left half of the sign is the Best Buy logo: a yellow ticket with the words Best Buy in bold. On the right side are two words: Nationwide Non-Commission. Under these two words are: Exit Barrett Pkwy. Turn left.

The entire sign is nine words! In those few

words, you get the story. You understand you're getting value for your money. You learn that Best Buy stands out from their competitors by not giving you a pushy, commission-driven sales force. You glean that Best Buy has a national presence. And you know how to get there with ease.

If you designed a billboard for your dental practice, what would it look like?

Scott Bradbury, who played a leading role in the branding of Starbucks and Nike, writes in his book, "A New Brand World," "A great brand taps into emotions. Emotions drive most, if not all, of our decisions.... A great brand is a story.... Stories create the emotional context people need to locate themselves in a larger experience."

Good luck in creating your story, brand, and connection with your patients. ■

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