



# Differentiating YOUR Dealership

*It's More Important Now Than Ever!*

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do not stop marketing your dealership.**

By Trish Brock

As we begin 2009 with some sobering economic realities, dealers are faced with decisions on how to best weather these challenging times. What can be done to assure not only survival, but short and long term success? And more specifically, how can dealers compete and differentiate more effectively?

Companies do not stop making decisions or doing business – they just do less of it. While dealers are scrutinizing their own budgets, too often marketing dollars and sales support are cut. Big mistake.

Do not, and it's worth repeating, do not stop marketing your dealership. Now more than ever, sales efforts need the support of focused marketing. Marketing is not an expense; it is an investment in your future, particularly in a challenged economy. If you choose to limit communicating with current and future customers by cutting marketing efforts, you are also choosing to be less visible.

Research has proven that companies who continue and/or increase their marketing efforts will improve their market share in tough times. Think about it. If you maintain or increase your marketing efforts while your competition retreats from theirs, your efforts will have less “clutter” to compete with and your message will have greater strength and impact. You can actually have more “bang for your buck” when actively marketing in a down economy; propelling your visibility in the absence or reduction of competitive messaging.

## How to Differentiate your Dealership

Obviously, the ultimate goal is to retain existing and win new business. Dealers are competing for mind-space (awareness), market share and obviously specific projects. Competition is stiff, customers are smart and have many options. Narrowing your margins and dropping prices doesn't always win the project and is not a viable long term strategy.

Having differentiating brand attributes will set your dealership apart from the crowd. It will give buyers a reason to talk to you, and then buy from you. Below are suggestions on how to identify and establish your differentiating message.

### Context

What does the marketplace think of you and your competition? What are the strengths and weakness in the minds of your target customers and influencers? It doesn't matter what you think, it only matters what your current and prospective customers think. How is your dealership remembered? Get a clear and unbiased snapshot – it's your first step in understanding how to set yourself apart.

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## To be different is to be not the same.

May sound obvious, but in this era of fear, hunkering down and “playing it safe” mentality, now is an opportune time to establish your differences. Being different is not having the same conversation your competitors are having, i.e. better service, better product, yada yada. Me-tooism should not be a dominant factor when wooing customers.

- What separates you from your competitors?
- Why should your prospect buy from you?
- What makes you better?
- What do you stand for?
- What benefit will your customer receive that they won't from your competitors?

Understanding how you share the mind-space of your marketplace will help reveal the answers to these questions.

According to Jack Trout, a famous international branding expert, owning an attribute is probably the number one way to differentiate. In his book, *Differentiate Or Die*, he states that you can't share an attribute with a competitor – being similar won't work. It's unique to you - you must be able to own it. Even better, search for an opposite attribute that allows you to play off against the leader – the key word here is opposite. Example: Coca Cola was the original and therefore the implied choice of older people. Pepsi successfully positioned itself as the choice of the younger generation.

## Prove it.

Making a claim without proof is nothing more than an empty promise. You can't differentiate by making it up. Your customers are already skeptical and too sophisticated for that.



Demonstrate your difference and let this become your credential. **Be real, be authentic.**

Social proof is one way to state your claims. For example, a statement such as, “XYZ dealer is the preferred dealer for 80% of the medical facilities in the region” is a powerful claim. Using 3rd party endorsements also reinforces differentiating claims. It gives assurance to prospective buyers that by choosing you, they would be part of a satisfied group of customers.

## Bring it to life!

Live it. You can not over-communicate your differentiating message. You can't keep your difference a secret - be prepared to spend the time, effort and money to make your message known. Be sure your communication vehicles are consistent and targeted – web sites, sales literature, email blasts, newsletters, RFP's, sales presentations and your sales people's interactions in the market place. All the sales skills in the world won't help the salesperson sent into the market with a weak message and little support.

Differentiate yourself from your competitors and communicate boldly. There may be less business to win these days, but customers have many options and are still faced with making choices. Set yourself apart. Give your prospects a reason, consistently, to choose your dealer. If you don't, your competitors will.

Trish Brock, Principal of Trish Brock & Associates, is a well-known industry consultant. Her cross-functional consulting group specializes in helping dealers solve identity, branding and sales support collateral challenges. She also conducts Perceptual Market Assessments and Culture Evaluations to better define market positioning and effective brand messaging. She can be reached at 720-277-3035 or at [tbrock@trishbrockassoc.com](mailto:tbrock@trishbrockassoc.com).

