

Momentum

Playbook 7

Listen In, Listen Up (Part 2)

By Maria Ross

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Playbook 7:

Listen In, Listen Up (Part 2)

Helping Doctors to Speak Like Humans

As some of you know, in 2008, I survived a ruptured brain aneurysm. I won't go into the whole saga here (but you can check out [my memoir](#) if interested! OK, sorry, I digress....), but I came out of that experience wanting to use my voice to help other brain injury patients get back on their feet and stand up for their own care.

Part of that calling came in the form of being a Patient Advisor at the hospital that saved my life and speaking at medical conferences about the patient point of view.

I assisted with trainings for clinicians and doctors on a technique called Teach Back. It's a method to ensure that when doctors give you important medical information, such as self-care procedures at home or dosage information, you understand the instructions and can follow them.

One of my methods for teaching this is to remind doctors and nurses that not everyone lives in their medical world so, please, ditch the jargon and acronyms and speak our language. I point out that we can be very smart, highly-educated members of society and not know what the heck an "angioplasty" is or the actual meanings for common acronyms (for them) such as: SAH, ICF, CSF or PCP.

Why? Because healthcare is not our world. We don't live, eat and breathe it like they do.

Is what they are saying accurate and valuable? Absolutely. But if they don't say it in a way that their patients can understand, then it's pointless.

It's the same with your business or project. You know it intimately. You live, eat and breathe it yourself every day. Your audience does not.

If you've got a sales page up and no one is biting, you have to check in with folks and ensure you are communicating effectively.

What are the headlines your customers need? What language do they speak? To find out, you have to ask them. Directly.

Get Your Barbara Walters On

Last week, we covered how to listen in on your ideal clients to find out what they need, want and crave relevant to your industry. Listening in on social media is a great first step to broadly finding out what your audience cares about.

But now it's time to stop eavesdropping and get direct. And to specifically find out not just what they need but perhaps, what they think of YOU.

It's time to interview some folks. Real live human beings. One-on-one or in an intimate group.

It's invaluable to reach out to hand-picked individuals and directly ask them what challenges they face, what solutions they seek, what benefits they crave, and what would absolutely delight them and make their lives easier.

Scary, I know. But you have to get out of your own head and find out what's in the heads and hearts of your target audience.

Identify a few beloved clients or customers to whom you can speak. Or find people who fit the ideal audience for your art, project or big idea

Don't have any yet? Well, lucky that you are now armed with your ideal client personas. Use them! Even if you're a brand new business with zero clients, you surely know at least three people in your circle – or those people know someone – who fit those descriptions.

Get Ready For a Joyful Experience

Hopefully, this story will get you excited about intimately connecting with your audience.

When I first began creating MOMENTUM and it was just a twinkle in my eye, I struggled for the words to describe it. I wasn't even sure where it was going at the time.

Yes. Me. Struggling for words. Alert the media.

It was one of those moments as a marketer when I questioned my own expertise. I mean, c'mon, I do this for clients *every single day!* Why was I doubting that my message was coming across clearly?

When I work for others, I can spot their mistakes as if they were bright neon arrows. As an observer, it can be easy to detect inconsistencies, see the creative brilliance or connect the seemingly obvious dots.

Objectivity is a sly little superpower. Use it!

I can see those things in your business, marketing or even your psyche because I'M NOT IN IT! And I bet the same is true for you, too.

Our faces pushed up too close to the glass, we can't see the bigger picture. Worse, we live in our own bubble when it comes to our businesses and we either think everything is important and needs to be communicated right now, or we fail to see when we're out of touch or just plain confusing to others because it sounds so good in our own heads. We just love to guess.

I got lazy and was guessing, too.

So I stepped back and did three things to better connect with my target audience:

1. I hand-picked several past clients—or colleagues with whom I never worked but who fit my ideal client profile—and invited them to a 30-minute phone interview.
2. I identified six to ten local entrepreneurs and invited them to a tea party/business-boosting salon at my home.
3. Since I do business everywhere, not everyone lives in my backyard, so I also held a “Virtual Connection Tea” by conference call and invited 25-30 folks, of which 16 attended. I sent them biscotti to enjoy with their tea while they were all on the line together!

These calls and gatherings were the highlight of my year.

We spoke about goals, challenges, and needs when it came to building their business, taking the next step or managing their marketing. I heard them loudly and clearly: what they wanted, what they DIDN'T.

These efforts also allowed me to reconnect with people I admired with whom I hadn't spoken in a while. I got to check in with them, hear what was going on, and support their work.

And mostly, I got to hear them say what they needed in their own words. Not my experienced brand strategist jargon, but really and truly the questions to which they wanted answers. Not a guess on my part, but their actual words.

Armed with that information, I crafted MOMENTUM. For you.

Of course, I knew what I wanted to teach and what was important. But I framed it in a way that spoke to people's real needs. And I have used all of that input for blog post topics, during podcast interviews, and in other ongoing marketing efforts.

I plan to do something like this every single year, it was so much fun and so invaluable!

Ideas for Listening to Your Tribe

Your audience is right in front of you. So GO TALK TO THEM! Here are four ideas:

1. **Send them a short survey:** Whether you have an email list or want to send this out to targeted individuals, surveys are a great way to find out what's going on. They are easy to create using [SurveyMonkey](#) for free or perhaps just a short Google form.
2. **Ask them a thought-provoking question via email:** This is a great way to use an auto-responder when someone new joins your email list. When I was wondering if the phrase "irresistible brand" resonated with people, I asked my email subscribers to hit REPLY and fill in the blank: "*I want my brand to be _____!*" NOTE: If you don't have an email list yet, just do this with targeted individuals. We'll be talking more about building your list later.
3. **Interview them individually by phone.** This is so powerful, I can't even convince you enough. As mentioned, I reached out to a few beloved past clients and colleagues who match my ideal client personas and talked to them about what they want and need. The feedback was amazing and helped shape MOMENTUM!
4. **Gather a group of them together.** Not keen on one to one interviewing? Hold a small group event – live or virtual. My Business Tea Party at my home and my Virtual Tea Party are just two examples. But you could do a private workshop, a wine and cheese social or even just a casual coffee shop mind-meld. When I interviewed [Mike Michalowicz](#), aka The Toilet Entrepreneur, aka The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur, for my brand book, he told me that he has conducted private weekend retreats with select clients at a rental house in the mountains. He said he got to know them so well and it changed everything for him. *PS: If I'm your ideal client and you'd like to do this, please sign me up!*

Reach out to your existing audience or people who fit the bill for the type of audience you'd like to have. Send them a quick note, prepare a few direct and simple questions to discuss and be respectful of their time.

NOTE: If you go the virtual route, be sure you feel comfortable being a good facilitator. When no one can see each other, you have to be deft at guiding the conversation and probing those people who are a bit more introverted or silent.

Take careful note of the actual words or phrases they use. How do they articulate their pain points or needs? Use these words in your messaging and marketing. When they read your website or materials, they'll feel like you're reading their minds!

Sometimes the easiest way forward, is the simplest. When you are not sure of something, ask the people who know.

Good and Bad Questions to Ask

It's important not to ask leading or overwhelming questions of people. While open-ended questions are good, give them something that is specific enough to help them pinpoint their thoughts yet broad enough that it can address wherever they are on the spectrum.

Good: What is the biggest hassle when it comes to marketing your business online?

Bad: What could I offer to serve you better? *(that's too much pressure!)*

Good: How would you describe your current health and wellness strategy?

Bad: Do you think it's important to be healthy and fit? *(um, who is going to say no?!)*

Good: What tasks do you hate the most/take the longest when you do your clients' books?

Bad: Would our accounting software help? *(I don't know...will it?!)*

Good: If you could wave a magic wand, what one chore or task would you outsource as a new mom?

Bad: With what do you need help with as a new mom? *(everything?!)*

Good: How do you most often consume online information: video, podcast, emails or blogs?

Bad: How should I market to you? *(Yikes! I don't want to be "sold" to!)*

Good: What traits do you look for when working with a business coach? What traits turn you off?

Bad: Will you hire me? *(Um, you said this wasn't a sales pitch!)*

Stay Classy, San Diego

If you ask anyone for their time, the gracious thing to do is offer them a thank you or goodie. It's not just the right thing to do but can be fun for you and says something about your brand. We're all busy and their time and feedback is a valuable gift.

What can you offer? Some ideas:

- A coffee gift card
- A [to-die-for gift basket of chocolate covered cherries](#)
- A donation to a charity of their choice
- A [healthy snack box](#)
- A freebie: One hour of coaching, a headshot portrait session or a free ticket to your next event.

Your Assignment: Send an Invite and Start The Conversation

Identify five people you know who fit your ideal client personas (they don't have to actually be your customers or clients) and write their names below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

While I gave you [four possible feedback-capturing options](#), #3 and #4, conducting one-on-one or group interviews/conversations, are super effective so I'm going to ask you to stretch yourself and try one or the other!

Now, send each person a personalized email to ask them for a one-on-one phone interview or to participate in your group gathering.

For a one-on-one interview, here is a template you can use and adapt to your own voice:

Dear Jake,

Hope everything is going well these days with your [business/family/big volunteer project.]

I'm cooking up something amazing these days and since you were one of the best clients I ever worked with (seriously) I would love to get your feedback. Could I please ask you a kind favor?

I'm doing some research for my business on my ideal client's challenges and goals, and you, of course, are a perfect match for the type of person I'd like to attract. Could you spare 30 minutes, either by phone or in person (coffee is on me!) to chat with me and answer some simple questions about what would help you the most when it comes to [your subject area]? I promise this is not a sales call!

Your time is valuable so if you're able to indulge me, I'd like to thank you by [your fun perk or freebie.]. Your feedback will be invaluable to help me tailor [products/services/messaging] so that my [event/business/book] gives people exactly what they need.

Please let me know what you think and which dates work best. Thank you so much for helping me grow my business and serve more people!

Many thanks,

For a group gathering or “tea party,” here is a template you can use:

Dear Debra,

How are things going with your [business/family/big volunteer project]? I saw your recent [blog post/Facebook post/event, etc] about [fitness/cloud computing/living with a newborn]

I’m in a course right now to help me boost my business and serve more people and our assignment this week is to reach out to ideal clients.

Naturally, I thought of you!

You and several other hand-picked rockstars are invited to join me for a fun “networking salon” at my house. We’re going to sip tea (or wine!), make connections and share our goals and challenges when it comes to [your subject area].

Your insights and input are always spot-on and would be invaluable to help me shape my offerings and better serve my audience. Plus, you’ll get to meet some pretty cool people to boot!

There’s no catch. And snacks and beverages are all on me.

Time:

Date:

Address:

Will you do me the honor of attending? I hope it’s a “yes” so I can start knitting your custom placemat and matching napkin. Wait....who am I kidding?! But at least you’ll be able to sample my famous brownie bites and use the good china.

Please RSVP by xx/xx/xx.

Craft and customize your own invitation in the space below:

Finally, come up with the questions you will ask during your one-one-one or group interviews. If you’re inspired, come up with questions you could ask to a larger group in an email survey:

But wait, you're not quite done....

Now: post your next steps and sample invitations or survey questions from this week's assignment in our nurturing Facebook group for a chance to win a fabulous prize from yours truly.

Remember, we are here to encourage you and provide any feedback. If you're like me, often it's fellow collaborators that help me polish my ideas to a glossy sheen.

Again, I'm going to reward you all year long, so don't lose your MOMENTUM: Post it now and keep that train moving!

One Last Thing...

Again, I will say: Understanding your audience is not going to happen overnight.

These interviews won't all take place this week. But you can get the ball rolling now. Identify the right people. Send out some invitations.

Just. Start.

This week's assignment may be taking place in the background of our work together for the next few weeks. Perhaps you need time to pull your group event together. Or you have to coordinate busy schedules.

If you're not working on a "business" per se, you still need an audience. Which means you still need to understand what makes them tick. Craft your questions to speak to the information that will be most useful to your particular creative endeavor. If you write books, find out what people love or hate about your genre, how they read these days or where they buy. If you sell art, find out how they feel about collecting and buying art, where they display it, how much time and energy they are willing to invest, how they want it to make them feel.

Don't get discouraged. Take initial action this week and know this may take you a few weeks to fully complete and synthesize. When you get those insights and "A ha's" please share them with us.

Happy listening!

Maria

Goodies and Inspirations

SurveyMonkey has lots of great resources but I especially like this quick read on [how to draft effective survey questions](#).

My pal, publicity expert Melissa Cassera, has been the inspiration for some of my coolest methods for gathering customer feedback. You may want to [subscribe to her fun and useful emails](#).

A little salesy and cheesy, but Derek Halpern has some sound advice. Here's [the one simple question he suggests you ask when someone buys from you](#). It's a great question to ask when they are fresh off of deciding you are the right person for them.

If you're looking to get specific customer feedback on your brand, products or services, [here are some good ideas](#).