

Permission marketing: turning strangers into friends, and friends into customers

The man Business Week calls "the ultimate entrepreneur for the Information Age" explains "Permission Marketing" -- the groundbreaking concept that enables marketers to shape their message so that consumers will willingly accept it.

Whether it is the TV commercial that breaks into our favorite program, or the telemarketing phone call that disrupts a family dinner, traditional advertising is based on the hope of snatching our attention away from whatever we are doing. Seth Godin calls this Interruption Marketing, and, as companies are discovering, it no longer works.

Instead of annoying potential customers by interrupting their most coveted commodity -- time -- Permission Marketing offers consumers incentives to accept advertising voluntarily. Now this Internet pioneer introduces a fundamentally different way of thinking about advertising products and services. By reaching out only to those individuals who have signaled an interest in learning more about a product, Permission Marketing enables companies to develop long-term relationships with customers, create trust, build brand awareness -- and greatly improve the chances of making a sale.

In his groundbreaking book, Godin describes the four tests of Permission Marketing:

1. Does every single marketing effort you create encourage a learning relationship with your customers? Does it invite customers to "raise their hands" and start communicating?
2. Do you have a permission database? Do you track the number of people who have given you permission to communicate with them?
3. If consumers gave you permission to talk to them, would you have anything to say? Have you developed a marketing curriculum to teach people about your products?
4. Once people become customers, do you work to deepen your permission to communicate with those people?

And in numerous informative case studies, including American Airlines' frequent-flier program, Amazon.com, and Yahoo!, Godin demonstrates how marketers are already profiting from this key new approach in all forms of media.

