
Step Into The Spotlight!—'Cause All Business is Show Business!

by **Tsufit**

Note: This article is an amended excerpt from the book Step Into The Spotlight!

It's noisy out there! Making it in today's overcrowded marketplace depends less on having a Harvard MBA and more on being a star; less on being great at what you do and more on whether you can capture the scarcest commodity of all—your market's attention.

It's like your prospects have a television remote and they're flicking through the channels to see what's on. You hope it's you. But sometimes it feels like you're stuck on Channel 632.

I remember when it first hit me. The epiphany.

I'd been a downtown lawyer for 10 years, Dean's List, black robes, the whole bit. My mom was so proud. Until one day I ditched it all to follow my lifelong dream of being a performer. My mother was predictably "supportive"—"Actress, schmactress!"—but I did it anyway. Litigation lawyer leaves law for limelight. Got on a sitcom, did standup comedy on national TV, put out a music CD that made radio top album lists internationally.

Before you know it, "The Suits" came calling, asking me to speak at their conferences, to consult on their marketing, and to coach them to stand out and get noticed. Why me? They were the ones with the MBAs and corner offices. Suddenly it clicked. I knew something they didn't know. And here it is: All business is show business!

It's not about baking a better bagel (the "bake it and they will come" theory); it's about branding it. It's about getting them lined up around the corner for that bagel. It's about attracting and holding your audience's attention. And no business knows how to do that better than show business.

Show business is the business of telling (and selling) stories. Since show business can't exist without an audience, the most valuable and bankable asset in show business is star quality—the ability to attract and captivate an audience. These things are true for any business, but not everyone got the memo.

There's so much that business can learn from showbiz. Not to step onto the stage with a lousy script. How to give a blockbuster performance. How to get your face in the newspaper without robbing a bank. But, before you can even think about how to develop box-office appeal for your business, you gotta know what part you're playing.

Be your own casting director

When I was a kid, we'd all audition for the high school musical, barely sleeping that night and then rushing to school at 8 AM to see the cast list posted in the front foyer. We'd all push and shove to see it first and then spend the rest of the morning asking each other, "What'dya get?" I was thrilled when I was cast in the role of Liesl in *The Sound of Music* and Yente in *Fiddler on the Roof*, crushed when Anita in *West Side Story* went to a bleached blonde... didn't they know Anita was supposed to be a spunky brunette?

In business, you don't have to wait to see the cast list. You can become your own casting director. *You* get to choose the role you want to play.

It starts with a decision—to stop auditioning for business, to stop trying to fit yourself or your

company into a role that you think customers want you to play. Focus instead on the role you want to play, the role you were born to play.

Below, some things to consider.

Who do you want to be, Batman or Robin?

You know Robin's never gonna get his own show. The spotlight is not for everybody; but if you're willing to go for it, the rewards of stardom are great. I'm talking "M&Ms-in-the-green-room" great. Why settle for playing a bit part?

Do you want to be a truffle or a Hershey bar?

Many businesses don't give positioning any thought. You gotta consider your role in the marketplace. We'll never see Al Pacino sweatin' to the oldies. You'd never confuse Richard Simmons with Gene Simmons. Ben Kingsley will never be up against Will Ferrell at a casting call. Different personas. Different brands.

Some companies get this—you'd never confuse a Volvo with a Lamborghini—but not all businesses have that kind of focus.

"I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille"

In a movie, each actor plays only one character. Yet, if you ever drag yourself to a 7:30 AM Chamber of Commerce Networking Breakfast, this is what you'll hear: "I'm here today wearing two hats. I'm a rocket scientist and I make gift baskets on the side."

A lot of businesses do that. McDonald's selling pizza? If you were in the mood for pizza, would you ever round up the gang and head on out to McDonald's? You can't wear two hats on one head.

Nobody reads Playboy for the articles

Even when businesses are focused on selling only one thing, it's often the wrong thing. They think they're selling soup when really they're selling comfort. They think they're selling makeup when really they're selling confidence. It's easy to get confused.

Sometimes even the big boys get it wrong. Coca-Cola got duped by Pepsi into thinking it was selling taste. Pepsi distracted Coke with The Pepsi Challenge and Coke responded by coming out with New Coke, a soft drink that, in blind taste tests, scored better than Pepsi or Coke. The biggest fiasco in marketing history... all because Coke forgot the role that it played in the marketplace.

Coke wasn't about taste any more than Playboy was about the articles. Coke forgot that it was "the real thing," "the American Dream in a bottle," as former Pepsi CEO Roger Enrico once described it.

Cast or be cast

The danger of not positioning yourself at all is that your competition may do it for you. Check out the Mac vs. PC commercials.

Literally bringing the competing brands to life, Apple presents Mac guy as young, cool, creative and easygoing. Yeah, he's a bit smug, but it's all part of the persona. PC guy, on the other hand, is portrayed as bumbling, fussy, complicated, hopelessly out-of-date and uncomfortable in his own skin.

As any actor knows, once you've been typecast, it's hard to change your audience's perception.

Don't ignore the Continuity Department

On every movie set, there's a Continuity Department, often just one woman wandering around with a clipboard and a Polaroid camera making sure that if the character's shirt was untucked in Take 2 it's still untucked in Take 12. That's so the editors can piece the movie together.

Your audience is trying to piece *your* story together, so you gotta pay particular attention to the issue of continuity when developing your character or brand. If you miss anything, your audience will be more than happy to point out any inconsistencies. (Just ask Coke.)

Ben and Jerry's' actions get more scrutiny (and criticism) because of its well-publicized social policies. Unilever has been repeatedly accused of hypocrisy for Dove's dramatic criticism of the beauty industry, an industry that Unilever supports with brands like Slim-Fast and Axe.

There are no small parts, only small actors

That's what they tell actors who grumble about their role. If you do inadvertently get cast in a bit part, like Henry Winkler did over 30 years ago in Happy Days, play it like the star anyway and see if you can seduce the spotlight.

Winkler's portrayal of Fonzie got him rave reviews and an offer to rename the show Fonzie's Happy Days. It could happen to you.

Recast the role

Definitely not easy, but it is possible to reposition your brand if you don't get it right the first time. Marlboro wasn't a huge success when it was first introduced in the 1920s as a woman's cigarette with the tagline "Mild as May."

In the early '50s Philip Morris repositioned it as the preferred brand of cowboys. (There are probably only 23 actual cowboys in all of America, but somehow it became a leading brand. Me...? I suspect an accountant or two snuck out and bought a pack. Who doesn't want to be a macho Marlboro man?)

Philip Morris eventually did score with its female audience (a mere 50 years after its first attempt) by selling feminism in the form of Virginia Slims.

Be an original

Forget bragging about being the best. Better isn't better. Different is. Buckley's Mixture isn't better. It's worse. They even admit it: "It tastes awful. And it works." Brilliant! Is Rod Stewart the best singer? The guy's like... what, 92? And still churning out hit albums!

Like a fly finds honey, like a cop finds donuts, like Dr. Phil finds book projects for his family, the spotlight finds originals. Create a compelling original role for your business and never forget the three cardinal rules of show business:

1. Don't bore 'em.
2. Don't bore 'em.
3. For G-d's sake, Don't Bore 'Em!

As David Ogilvy once said, "You can't bore people into buying."

See you in the spotlight!

Tsufit is a marketing consultant who coaches entrepreneurs and CEOs to be stars, and the author of *Step Into The Spotlight! 'Cause ALL Business is Show Business!: A Guide to Getting Noticed* (Beach View Books April 2008). Visit Tsufit at www.tsufit.com/blog.

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