

The Art of Messaging

7 Principles of Remarkable Messages
(Or How to Stand out in a Noisy World)



Henry Adaso

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(Or How to Stand out in a Noisy World)*

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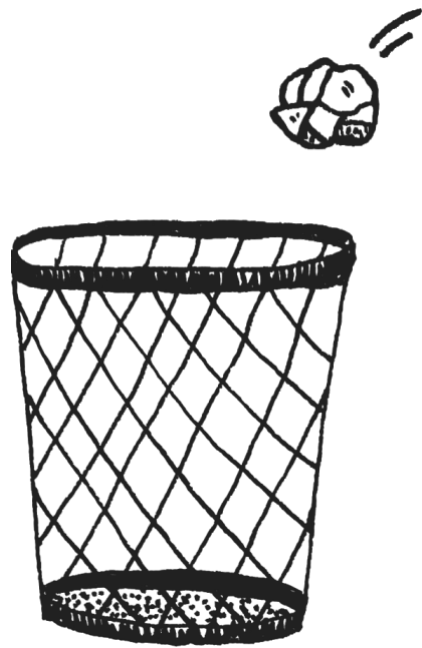
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INTRODUCTION



Bad Messaging Happens to Good Brands

Imagine that you are at a networking event with a group of innovators. You're trying to make small talk with one of the guests, and you ask, "So, what are you working on?"

He responds, "I'm building simulated neural networks integrated with deep-learning algorithms for synergistic collaborations. Our North Star is nanotech disruption."

As your brain scrambles in search of the perfect excuse to exit the conversation, another guest joins you and your new friend, drink in hand, smiling curiously. You reluctantly pose the same question to Guest B.

"My company turns food waste into money," she says.

Now imagine it's a day later, a week later, or even a month later and someone asks you to relay what these two people told you. How likely are you to recall Guest A's response? Even seconds after reading it, you are probably struggling to remember a single word.

What about Guest B's message? Much easier, right?

No offense to the synergistic nanotech disruptor — I'm sure neural networks are essential somehow, but I'll never know for sure. The problem is that the cognitive demand on the audience to digest this pitch will make most people lose interest. The mind likes to work efficiently. When tasked with an unnecessary mental burden, it seeks to escape.

Now, it's entirely possible that the synthetic neuron miracle worker is as compelling as the meals-to-money machine. But, explained with such a complicated word salad, we may never get a chance to find out.

No matter how great your product or service is, messaging can derail or enhance its appeal to your audience. When communication with your audience goes awry, we call it bad messaging. And bad messaging can happen to good brands.

Are some products inherently more interesting than others? Yes, but it's also true that smart brands understand how to harness and highlight the compelling attributes of their product or service into something concise and compelling.

Geico and Progressive have produced some of the most interesting marketing promotions of our time while selling a "boring" product (insurance). It takes skill to uncover the remarkability hidden in what may seem like a dull product or service.

When a Geico commercial says: "15 minutes can save you 15 percent or more on car insurance," it packs a lot of power with just 12 words. Geico makes a promise to value your time. They set a minimum financial goal of 15 percent (notice they don't say "up to" 15 percent). They provide a dash of hope with the words "or more." And they zoom in on the customer looking to save money on car insurance (not boat, house, health, or life insurance). The message is brilliant in its brevity and simplicity.

But State Farm is not to be outdone. Since 1971, "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there" has become synonymous with being rescued from the financial pain of a catastrophic loss. They even managed to pair those nine syllables with nine musical tones that elicit a positive feeling for most. Remarkably, they have also cultivated an emotional connection with their

audiences through a character consumers have grown to love — the mere mention of the four words “Jake from State Farm” conjures up a positive and relatable image.

Tight, neat, and compelling.

The Art of Messaging gives you the critical tools you need to create remarkable messaging that your audience will remember long after they see or hear it. By being remarkable, you increase your chances of earning attention, making a meaningful impact, and boosting your brand awareness. You gain the trust and permission to make a difference in your life and in the lives of your audience.

You Have a Remarkable Message

It’s tempting to think that the ability to create remarkable messaging is a talent reserved for superhumans. It’s easy to lionize great communicators as special people preordained by a supreme being to drive a message so deep into our psyches, it spills out in our conversations, becomes the punch line of our jokes, appears in our movies, and forces us to think about it involuntarily. We imagine these marketing gurus as mythical figures capable of capturing the soul and shifting the course of entire nations, allowing the expert to achieve the type of fame and fortune that would make Don Draper smirk with envy.

It turns out that there are no marketing prodigies. The ability to craft remarkable messaging is not a gift bestowed upon the born copywriter. What often seems like a stroke of genius is a structured message crafted by a professional after hours, days, or weeks of pouring effort into the practice and refining the message again and again.

Creativity is not a birthright. It’s a choice, and it’s available to anyone willing to trade sweat for magic.

Yes, you have a remarkable message to share. Yes, you can learn how to find it, create it, and promote it.

You Can Break Through in a Noisy World

Why should you trust the advice in this book? Aside from the evidence of remarkable messaging showcased by some of the world’s best brands, the principles in this book come from a wealth of experience. Over the past 16 years, I have created messages for web, print, social media, direct mail, radio, newspaper ads, videos, billboards, and even greeting cards. I’ve crafted messaging for some exciting products (streaming platforms, electric vehicles) and some that don’t exactly evoke excitement (forklifts, emergency vehicles). Regardless of the nature of the product or business sector, what I’ve found is that there is always a way to make the message stick.

Before I fell in love with marketing, I worked as a music journalist and copywriter. Music is all about evoking emotion. Journalism is all about telling the story. Copywriting is all about messaging. And marketing is the combination of all three.

What I learned in all my years toiling in the trenches are enduring lessons on how remarkable brands approach messaging. I have distilled these lessons into a short, no-fluff, practical book on how to create brand messages your audience will love, share, and remember.

How to Use This Book

In the pages that follow, you will discover the four essential messaging attributes, the five superpowers of world-class marketers, the seven core principles behind remarkable messages, the seven messaging styles, and a dozen writing tips to help you position your brand without feeling dirty and icky about the whole process.

We will discuss the common pitfalls to avoid, explore the powerful techniques employed by elite marketers, and deconstruct the DNA of memorable messages.

As you read through this book, think about your existing marketing program, and consider how the ideas might apply to your business. Wherever you see the term “product,” feel free to substitute your service, practice, or nonprofit. The messaging principles are designed to be adaptable to a variety of businesses.

Practice as you go. Each chapter includes an exercise at the end to help you implement the strategies discussed. Keep a journal of ideas that spring to mind as you learn.

I suggest making a copy of the seven messaging principles. Keep the list somewhere visible (e.g., on a sticky note, a whiteboard, or your desk) as a reminder.

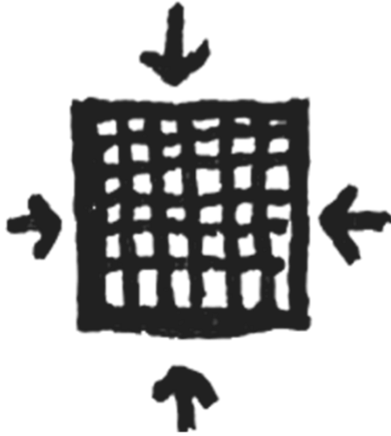
Using the principles in this book, you’ll discover how to create the type of messaging that makes people draw a sharp breath in awe, raise their eyebrows in amazement, nod in agreement, and, above all, recall the brand that gave them that feeling. You might even make them fall in love with your brand and, maybe, win a loyal customer.

PART 1

The Foundation

Side A.

The Four Attributes of Remarkable Messaging



If your attention feels more fragmented than ever, you're not alone. In the 1970s, the average adult saw about 500 messages per day. Today, we see anywhere between 5,000 and 10,000 messages per day. There are over 100 billion messages shared online each day, and over 330 billion emails are sent daily. The reality is that you are competing in the noisiest marketing environment in history.

If you want to be heard, if you want to be remembered, if you want to differentiate your brand, and if you want to build a profitable business, your message must be compelling enough to rise above the mounting heap of always-on content. Your message must be remarkable.

There are four attributes of **remarkable messaging**, and they spell out the word BEST. The BEST messages are bold, empathic, specific, and transformative.

Yes, I know. No one needs another acronym, but I've been in this business long enough to learn that it helps to have a memorable model that simplifies a complex system for success.

- **B** is for **Boldness**. *Is this message worth noticing?*
- **E** is for **Empathy**. *What's the emotional driver behind this message?*
- **S** is for **Specificity**. *What is it, and who is it for?*
- **T** is for **Transformation**. *How will this product or service change the audience?*

The mission is to raise the Remarkability Quotient (RQ) of your messages. Increasing the Remarkability Quotient of your messages is good for you, good for your brand, and good for your audience.

Boldness

Is this message worth noticing?

Boldness interrupts boredom. Bold messaging sticks its neck out by saying something worth noticing. But it also makes a promise it can keep. Remember Geico's promise to save the caller 15 percent in 15 minutes? It's a bold claim that had never been offered to a consumer before. People paid attention and new policies soared.

The human brain is hardwired to encode, store, and recall distinct memories. In other words, we remember things that disrupt a pattern. Most of us live on autopilot, cruising through the day with little to no variety in our daily activities. You probably check your email frequently, browse the same social media sites, and surf the same channels for news and entertainment. I do, too.

Routine tethers us to the world, helping us make sense of an otherwise varied and complex life. Something that snaps us out of our routine because it is bold or unexpected — something remarkable — captures our attention.

Seth Godin writes in *Purple Cow* (which you should go buy immediately from your favorite bookstore):

“Something remarkable is worth talking about. Worth noticing. Exceptional. New. Interesting. It’s a Purple Cow. Boring stuff is invisible. It’s a brown cow.”

Is your brand messaging worth noticing? Is it interesting? Is it exceptional? Is it a *Purple Cow*?

To be clear, boldness is not about making false promises or staging gimmicks to grab attention. Attention isn’t grabbed; it’s earned. It’s evident in the language we use to describe attention: we pay attention to the things we find engaging. If you’re willing to earn trust and engagement, the right people will pay attention to your business. You won’t even have to cajole them into showing up.

Walmart’s slogan is a cocktail of boldness and brevity in a messaging shot glass: “Save money. Live better.” That’s it. That’s the whole message. I love what Walmart is *not*. The copywriter might have considered “Save money. Live well.” Good, but not quite as bold. Or, how about “Low-cost everyday items available at Walmart.” Accurate, but not nearly as memorable. “Save money. Live better” is a compelling message because it implies an improvement in your quality of life. Improving one’s quality of life is a core human need, which explains why this slogan resonates with most people.

Decode, a Houston-based marketing agency, has a bold banner that makes people stop and pay attention at their events. It simply proclaims: “50% of Your Marketing Is Wasted. Let’s Make It Zero.” I love this message for its boldness, but also because it exemplifies the rest of the BEST messaging attributes: Empathy (“Let’s help you save some money”), Specificity (the message is clearly for marketing leaders) and Transformation (Future You will no longer waste your marketing budget). As Decode founder and CEO, Kathleen Perley, told me, customers see the banner and say, “Yes, that’s exactly how I’ve been feeling for years.” Perley adds: “A remarkable message is something that is memorable, but also empathizes with the audience and speaks their truth. It helps them feel that someone gets it, someone understands what I’m going through.”

The marketer employs boldness in the service of the audience.

Whether you’re brainstorming your company slogan or event banner, make it worthy of attention. If you have something to say, something useful, something capable of making an impact in the world of your audience, stick your neck out and be bold.

Empathy

What’s the emotional driver?

Some of the most important decisions in society don’t happen in public; they happen behind closed doors, at private fundraisers, via text messages, and in email inboxes. Look at the last political email or text message you received from a candidate seeking campaign contributions. Chances are that the messaging was pegged to an emotional need. Perhaps they promised to help

reduce the cost of healthcare, make your community safer, or bring back vanishing jobs. More than any other species, politicians on all sides of the aisle understand one universal truth: we are all emotional beings. They know they will have to touch our pain points or connect to our deepest philosophical truths if they want us to pull the lever for them.

Politicians are not the only ones who use emotional motivators in their messaging. Marketers in all industries are familiar with the role of emotion in messaging. In fact, appealing to human emotion is one of the most effective ways to engage an audience. It begins with empathy.

Empathy vs Manipulation

Before we go any further, I think it's important to clarify the difference between empathy and manipulation.

- **Manipulation** is tricking people into buying things they don't need or want, which often leads to regret. It also involves making a promise to get a sale that the company knows it cannot fulfill, which leads to anger and costly returns.
- **Empathy** is helping others lighten the burden of life by appealing to their core human needs or connecting with something they deeply desire.

The mission is to help other people win. When you help others win, you have a chance to win, too.

Remarkable messaging creates empathy. It requires you to see through the eyes of your audience. Empathy urges you to walk in the shoes of those who might not think, act, or look like you. Understanding the emotional needs of those you hope to reach raises your chance of resonating through empathy.

Too many brands get this wrong. They focus on how impressive the company is or how many awards they've won. Remarkable messaging does not concern itself with the capabilities of the brand; it empowers the audience instead. It answers the oldest question in human history, "What's in it for me?"

Imagine if Apple said, "We think differently." This subtle change shifts the meaning and intent behind their core messaging. It would have placed the emphasis on Apple and might have been (subconsciously) viewed as self-congratulatory. Instead, Apple asserts that its products are for those who "Think different." The focus is entirely on the customer.

What if Nike said, "We just do it"? The message no longer feels personal. But "Just do it" is a call-to-action, a personal battle cry to attack your dreams. The message is bigger than the brand. "We just do it" is a "we" message. "Just do it" is a "you" message.

Is your brand message a "we" message or a "you" message?

Think of ways to say to the customer, "Let's talk about you." This means focusing on the problem the customer is trying to solve.

The stock photo brand Shutterstock offers an example of "you" messaging: "Access all the images, videos, music, and tools you need to turn ideas into achievements."

Here is another example of “you” messaging from the data software company ZoomInfo: “Get the B2B data and software you need to connect with and close your most valuable buyers — all in one operating system.”

Empathic messaging places the customer’s needs ahead of the company’s capabilities. Avoid the trap of bragging about your company in favor of putting the customer at the center of your message.

What We Really Care About

Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed eight basic human needs in his 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation.” According to Maslow, the basic needs are:

1. Physiological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Belonging and love needs
4. Esteem needs
5. Cognitive needs
6. Aesthetic needs
7. Self-actualization needs
8. Transcendence needs

Sure, a lot has changed since 1943, but the instinct to seek out basic desires is still ingrained in us. It simply looks different in the modern world. Today, belonging needs may look like joining an exclusive country club, and esteem needs can look like having a perfectly curated Instagram feed.

Emotional Drivers

Maslow’s pyramid of human needs is a compelling foundation for understanding our basic desires. In the context of modern life, we could expand needs and wants into the following categories by exploring people’s desires to:

1. Make more money online
2. Save money for vacation
3. Save time and effort through automation
4. Help the family
5. Have more fun
6. Gain knowledge to advance in career
7. Earn praise and affection
8. Gain security in old age
9. Be more comfortable in one’s skin
10. Become popular
11. Be a better parent
12. Be a better sibling
13. Be a better spouse

14. Influence others
15. Be more sociable
16. Be expressive
17. Enjoy life more
18. Become a subject matter expert
19. #BOSSUP
20. Travel the world
21. Have luxurious possessions
22. Take advantage of new opportunities
23. Minimize embarrassment
24. Be respected
25. Satisfy curiosity
26. Be more creative
27. Become an early adopter
28. Be more confident
29. Move in better social circles
30. Get a better job
31. Emulate admirable people
32. Stay ahead of peers
33. Resist boredom
34. Be more likable
35. Become a social media influencer

Emotional Demotivators

Emotional drivers are not limited to wants and needs. People also have a desire to minimize difficulties. Aside from the fear of losing access to your Netflix account, you want to avoid:

1. Criticism
2. Pain
3. Loss of money
4. Damage to reputation
5. Loss of property
6. Trouble with the law
7. Physical danger
8. Regret
9. Sickness and diseases
10. Loneliness and boredom

Activate Emotional Drivers in Your Messaging

Empathic messaging understands that these underlying human desires and demotivators drive us to make buying decisions. If your messaging speaks to one or more basic needs, you increase

your chance of connecting with your customers and prospects. When developing your next marketing campaign, look for ways to activate at least one emotional driver to make your message matter.

Specificity

What is it, and who is it for?

Messaging should be so clear that it doesn't defeat the audience. The key to unlocking this level of specificity is to first clarify your audience. Then, focus generously on what they need or want from you. Once you're clear on what's on offer and who it's for, spell it out in your messaging.

There are two types of specificity in messaging. Specificity can be *connotative* (meaning it's implied) or *denotative* (meaning it's expressed). Connotative specificity winks and nods at the audience using inside language and symbolism and trusting the audience to get the hint. Denotative specificity clearly calls out the audience by name. No matter which approach you choose, make it clear why your audience should care.

For a good example of specificity in messaging, take a look at the value proposition of the sports media company The Athletic.

The Athletic brings you the best sports journalism in the world in a personalized experience, connecting you with the stories and teams that you care about the most. There's coverage of 13 sports, plus direct access to world-class journalists through live Q&A, discussions, and podcasts.

It's clear what's on offer. The brand messaging highlights deep sports coverage, plus access to world-class journalists and a personalized experience. The message is reflective of the engaged and passionate nature of sports fandom. It's clear what it is, who it's for, and why you should care.

If boldness is necessary to earn attention, specificity is vital for holding and nurturing it. When you specify what's on offer, and the audience understands clearly what you're asking, they're more likely to take action.

Transformation

How will this change the audience?

To deliver the greatest value inherent in your product or service, tell your audience how it will transform their lives. We don't buy a gym membership for access to state-of-the-art fitness equipment (benefits); we buy an attractive body (transformation). We don't book a hotel merely for the large guest rooms or great views (benefits); we buy a summer getaway that will leave us

blissful and refreshed (transformation). In each case, we can visualize the transformative outcomes of our decisions, not just the benefits or features.

Let's say, for example, that your widget helps people make more money. The benefit — “you'll make more money” — is not always enough to cut through the clutter. People are more likely to pay attention when you highlight the transformative outcome they can expect. Transformative messaging suggests that you focus on the lifestyle, possessions, or relief of a physical or emotional pain money can afford your audience. In our example, earning more money might make it possible for them to attend their kid's soccer practice and be fully present. Maybe it's the flexibility to travel anywhere in the world, helping them fulfill a bucket list goal. Or money could help them pay off grandma's mortgage. These are transformative outcomes.

To uncover the transformation, ask:

- Who will the customer become after taking action?
- How might it cause a life change?
- What insight will be gained?
- What will be different about the customer's situation?

Build a Messaging Tower™

Not all messages are created equal. There is a hierarchy in messaging, and I call this the Messaging Tower™. The Messaging Tower™ is a summary of the best features, benefits, and transformative outcomes of a product or service.

Features: Descriptive elements of your product or service. Features appeal to a technical audience. The driving question here is: *“What's it made of?”*

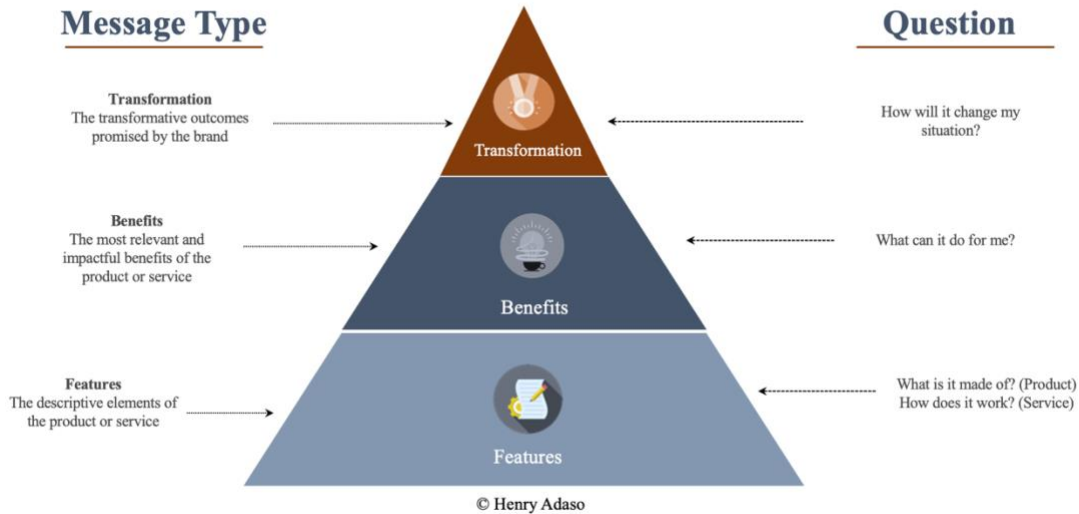
Benefits: Positive qualities of your product or service that enhance the customer's experience. Benefits appeal to a broader audience. The driving question here is: *“What can it do for me?”*

Transformation: The transformative outcomes of your product or service.

Transformation is the powerful WHY behind your message. The driving question here is: *“How will it change my situation?”*

Features lie at the base of the messaging tower. Benefits occupy the middle. Transformation sits at the top of the tower. If you want to break through the noise, you must harness and highlight the transformation.

The Messaging Tower™



Build your Messaging Tower™ by highlighting the best attributes of your product or service based on features, benefits, and transformation.

Examples of Transformation

Let's take another look at the messaging examples highlighted earlier through the lens of transformation.

Brand	Message	Transformation
Walmart	Save money. Live better.	<i>Enjoy a better life.</i>
ZoomInfo	Get the B2B data and software you need to connect with and close your most valuable buyers — all in one operating system.	<i>Close your biggest sales.</i>
Shutterstock	Access all the images, videos, music, and tools you need to turn ideas into achievements.	<i>Translate your best ideas into finished products.</i>
The Athletic	The Athletic brings you the best sports journalism in the world in a personalized experience, connecting you	<i>Always know what's going on with the teams you love and have an inside track to their stories.</i>

	with the stories and teams that you care about the most.	
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Remarkable messaging is bold, empathic, specific, and transformative.
- Boldness interrupts boredom. To earn attention in a noisy world, make your message worth noticing.
- Seek out opportunities to use emotional drivers in your messaging. Show your audience how your product or service can help them lighten a burden.
- Messaging should be so clear that it doesn't defeat the audience. Be specific about what's on offer and who it's for.
- Harness and highlight the transformation. To deliver the greatest value inherent in your product or service, tell your audience how it will transform their situation.
- Build a Messaging Tower™ to extract the features, benefits, and transformation of your product or service.

YOUR TURN

1. Review your most recent messages. See if you can find bold attributes or at least potential boldness.
2. Look for boldness in billboards and television advertisements.
3. Read your messaging out loud to a friend, family member, or pet. Ask, "Does this sound thoughtful?"
4. Visit your favorite brand's website. Identify the emotional drivers in their marketing messages.
5. Listen in on customer phone calls. Note the common complaints or recurring questions.
6. Visit your competitor's website. Look at their homepage headline and see if you can identify any features, benefits, or transformation.
7. Build a messaging tower for your product or service, listing the best features, benefits, and transformation.

Good Messages vs. Remarkable Messages

A good message informs.

A remarkable message transforms.

A good message describes the benefits.

A remarkable message shows the transformation.

A good message makes you think.

A remarkable message makes you feel.

Thank you!

Hey there, Superstar!

Thank you for reading a sample of *The Art of Messaging*. I hope you enjoyed it.

If you liked the sample, you'll love the full-length book.

If you have any questions about the book, drop me a line at henry@henryadaso.com

Talk soon,
Henry