# Making Your Idea, Vision, Marketing Communications, Web Site, or Anything Else “Sticky”

The concept of stickiness has been a matter of interest especially for web sites. How do you get people to remember your site and return to your site. On a larger scale, how do you create an idea or a marketing communication that is remembered…not only recalled but remembered in detail. This is the concept of sticky. The basis of this paper is a recent book by Chip Heath and Dan Heath called “Made to Stick”, published in 2007 by Random House. I recommend your getting a copy of this book if sticky is an issue that concerns you.

In a poll of 23,000 employees cited by Stephen Covey, only 37 per cent of employees could cite the basic mission and vision of their organization. Or in other words, if you were playing soccer with this team, 7 of your players would not be knowing which goal to put the ball into! Sticky is important. That said how do you make your thoughts, ideas, ads, web sites, vision or anything else sticky?

The authors offer six elements to work into your concepts in order to make them sticky.

1. SIMPLE…Simplicity helps us to understand what is being conveyed. The core concepts need to come through and provide a focus. A local newspaper publisher has a mission and the concept is “Names, Names, Names”. His guiding principal is to publish stories and names of locals…that is what local people want to read in a local paper. Simplicity can exist in other devices such as proverbs, analogies, metaphors, acronyms, etc. The core idea of Southwest Airlines under Herb Kelleher was to be the “low cost airline”. As a core concept you can see that everything done at the airline can be tested against this easy to understand idea.
2. Unexpected…Surprise gets attention and like the old marketing equation, A.I.D.A., which stands for Attention .. Interest .. Desire .. Action, surprise gets attention. Surprise is not about AHA, it is about HUH?? When President Kennedy said we would land men on the moon and bring them back during the 60’s, the people charged with this action had no knowledge of how to do this. It caused surprise and a HUH moment…how are we going to do that??? The unexpected is disruptive, and often emotional. Such ideas are often counterintuitive to get you to HUH!
3. Concrete…Your presentation, in order to be sticky, should stick to what is concrete as opposed to abstract. Examples, context, and images are concrete. When Boeing was developing a vision and mission for the development of the 727, a somewhat abstract description could have been to develop a medium distance aircraft serving a mid level market. However, the “concrete” vision was to create a plane that would carry 131 passenger from New York to Miami with capability to land at LaGuardia on runway 4-22 (a short runway under a mile). Now, which is concrete and which is abstract…and which is memorable and sticky? Math concepts are often presented as abstractions, but the subject can be taught in very concrete terms…say using marbles to show what happens when you take away (subtract) items. Look for ways to make even the most abstract concepts concrete is you wish for stickiness to occur.
4. Credibility …credibility can come from many sources, and credibility can make your concepts sticky. Credibility can come from your own experiences, from authorities, from anyone you believe (like parents)…we even imbue celebrities with some level of credibility. The source and whether that source is important is what counts. Credibility can also be developed using various forms of “truths” … usually in the form of vivid details. Statistics can also convey credibility if they are understood and if people care. The concept of this world having way too many nuclear warheads is a statistic … let’s say there are 5,000 nuclear warheads…doe sthat number do anything for you…it is accurate, but not exactly vivid. In fact the concept of MIGO or My Eyes Glaze Over is often a reaction to certain stats. But instead, consider holding a bucket and a ball bearing…and noting as you throw the ball bearing into the bucket that this represents the bomb that was dropped and destroyed Hiroshima. Now, take 5,000 ball bearings and start to pour them slowly into the bucket saying this is the sum of all bombs…this is a vivid demonstaration of a statistic…and is a credible way to present the impact of this number. Another way to present credible information is to show how it passes the test of some other situation. The fact that my company does work for the largest ad agency in the world is evidence that we can do such work for anyone. Credibility based on what is called the Frank Sinatra Test…”If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere”.
5. Emotions…caring is important to stickiness. If someone does not care, you lose them. Your communications and web site or vision needs to evoke some emotional reaction. A cook in a base camp near Bagdad tells his workers that we do not just cook, we are in charge of morale. Well fed soldiers are content. So they approach the feeding process from a gourmet point of view…and this mission rallies the mess workers to do great things in the kitchen…because they see how their work affects the morale of the troops. How many of us see the trouble and genocide in Darfur…a million dead is MIGO again. Emotions are tied to the individual cases…that was what Mother Teresa always projected…the one person she touched. Call it the Mother Teresa effect.
6. Stories…stories can really get the message across and make your message sticky. The best example cited is Jared and the Subway sandwich shop. And it has all the ideas and concepts of stickiness…start with the simple idea that eating at subway can be part of a weight loss program. Actually, a diet program at a fast food restaurant is really Unexpected! Yet look at those statistic…look at Jared holding up those super big pants ..that is concrete evidence of weight loss. Is Jared credcible…of course he is, he did it! The details and the proof are there. And if he can do, we can do! A brilliant story and a sticky one that everyone remembers. So, what and spot these possible stories…you could have the next Jared.

Again, for more details, pick up a copy of “Made to Stick” by Heath and Heath, 2007, Random House.