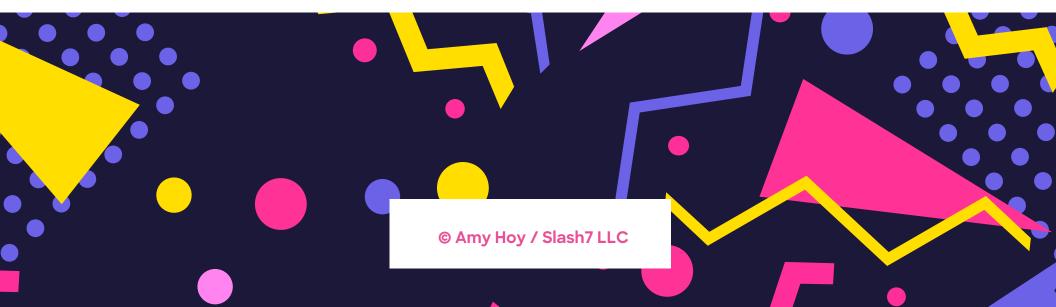your crash course for...

Marketing That Sells

history has some valuable lessons to teach us...
and content is awesome!

Make or Break Points

Make or break points; do or die points. Every project has them. Which ones do you face when you try to create a successful product? Well, there are three big ones:

First you've got to ensure you start off with the right concept. You've got to avoid Type 2 failures. You need to be sure you give your baby product the best chance of success from the very beginning.

Next, you've got to get that bad boy out the door. Finish and ship your product, or else it's as if it doesn't exist.

Lastly, you've got to market it — systematically, and effectively. Without marketing, nobody will know your product exists, and it's mighty hard to buy something if you don't know it exists.

"But I don't know anything about writing ads…"

And a good thing, too! You're not going to be *doing* any advertising. A little trip through time will show you why.

Back to the Past: Taking a Trip to 1898

There sure was a lot going on in the world in 1898: the beginning of the Spanish-American War, the assassination of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, the death on a public highway (in an electric car!).

But here's one thing — an important one — you've surely *never* heard of: the invention of advertising theory.

Yup, advertising theory. By the charmingly named E. St Elmo Lewis. He came up with the first documented funnel model for advertising (broad at the beginning, narrow at the end), and he called it AIDA.

AIDA stands for:

Attention
Interest
Desire
Action

Have you heard of AIDA before? You will have if you've read

anything on marketing, ever — but I bet you didn't realize it was 113 years old.

AIDA represents the most basic of formulas for how to sell something:

1. **First**, grab the Attention of your prospect. Light a match.
2. **Now** you've got the attention — don't waste it! Keep stoking the fire with something that *holds their Interest*.
3. **If you can keep 'em on the hook**, it's time to pile a bunch of extra flammable material onto that little flame to create a hunka hunka burnin' Desire (that your product can fulfill!).
4. **Lastly, when they're at a fever pitch**, motivate 'em to Action. To buy, try, do, execute, share, follow…

While advertising nerds today criticize AIDA as *overly simplistic*, the simple fact is: it works.

The people who criticize AIDA are the same people who create — or hate — "shock" ads, beer ads, and related ilk. Ads that rely on sex to sell something that isn't remotely sex-related, or ads where (for some unfathomable reason)

people are shooting gerbils out of cannons or punching clowns, or being pursued by giant disembodied puppet heads.

Ads that don't make sense.

These ads sure grab your attention and may even hold your interest. They may make you hungry or thirsty, for a moment. But they don't drive sales. No wonder creative directors are suspicious of AIDA.

But AIDA will work for you. Those creative directors are missing the most important parts of the puzzle. They think all they have to do is grab Attention, hold on tight, and then sell sell sell. But that's not the way it works. That's not *effective*.

To use AIDA effectively, you need only ensure that:

- the attention-grabbing, interest-holding, and desire-creating elements are both *relevant* to the product and *relevant* to the customer
- that the whole cycle is customer-focused and pro-customer, and that
- your product delivers the promised experience

So *yeah*, you can see how ad agencies might come to think AIDA doesn't work. Beer babe ads (and the majority of all ads) fail to meet *any* of the criteria above:

- beer babes have nothing to do with beer
- the advertising itself is designed to titillate, not serve the customer; it has no staying power
- and of course, the beer doesn't follow thru on the promises of the ads: half-naked ladies do not magically appear (plus it tastes bad!)

You can — and will — do better.

Because you've already done the work to create a compelling, useful Offer, and that will help you craft your secret weapon.

And it's *not* banners, keywords, clicks, or split-tests.

(A) **Capture Attention**… by being relevant & opinionated, loud & unique

(I) **Sustain Interest**… by being useful, useable, shareable, & pro-customer

(D) **Stoke Desire**… by focusing on the customer's story: needs, wants, pain, money, & aspirations

(A) **Inspire Action**… by helping the customer overcome fear & objections, & asking for the sale

Drop an E-Bomb on `Em

How do you capture attention? How do you hold it, to build prolonged interest? How do you really *reach* people, so they're not only *willing* to hear about your product — but are *eager* for it?

Simple: teach them something good.

Create something your potential customers will find interesting — *illuminating*. Teach them something. Help them level up. Save them some time. Save them pain & effort. Become a source of growth and support. Help them, the way your product will help them.

Educate them. (The "E" in "E-bomb" stands for *educate!*)

When you teach people, they'll get excited. They'll get passionate. They'll give your materials their full attention/ They'll share it with their friends. They'll remember you. They'll think of you. They'll trust you. They'll know what to expect from you.

They'll also be more receptive to anything you have to say, including "Buy this, it'll help, here's why."

Don't bother with *advertising*.

When you advertise, at best you're artificially bolting yourself onto the *side* of something people are actually interested in. You're either invisible, or you're interrupting people, getting in their way. That's *not* an effective way to win friends & influence people.

Compare that to all the benefits of *teaching* and you'll see why advertising is a waste of time. Teaching is the way to go.

Anyone can teach — yes, I mean you! — and teaching is free.

You Don't Need to be Famous (It Might Not Even Help)

When I preach about how to create and market products, people tend to look at me funny.

"But," they say, wagging their finger at me, "you're famous. You have it easy."

Advertising's also a waste of money, I've learned. So far, I've spent thousands on advertising that has failed to pay for itself, and I've heard the same from other people in similar businesses. People just don't pay attention to banners, and rarely to text ads. Clicks, even on those cute little boutique ads, are pathetic. (A 1% click-through rate is considered "good" — ludicrous!)

There's only one time when advertising really pays:

If you spend a huge chunk of time becoming a keyword advertising expert.

Unfortunately, unless you're already a keyword ad ninja, your time is almost surely better spent elsewhere. Especially when you can only work on your product part-time.

Is this an *effective* way to think?

Effective thoughts & effective actions always move you forward. They pave a path towards *better*: knowing better, working better, selling better, living better.

So it's pretty clear that "but that's because you're famous" is *not* an effective way to think. Even if the premise ("Amy is famous") is true (questionable). That way of thinking doesn't create any opportunities for *better* at all. It becomes an excuse.

What are the smart questions, then? The *effective* questions? Give it some thought. In the mean time, these are the ones *I* came up with:

- Is Amy *actually* famous?
- Does that fame *actually* make it so easy for her to sell things?
- Assuming she really *is* famous, how did she achieve that fame?
- What can I learn from *how* she does it and use that for myself?

My answers are "No, not hardly," "Only a little bit, it's still a lot

Ineffective:
"How do I have a great idea?"

Effective:
"How do I create something people will definitely buy?"

Ineffective:
"Oh, it's easy for YOU, you're famous! I bet they just line up to buy from you. But I'm a nobody."

Effective:
"How do reach more people, & get more of them to buy?"

of work, and the audiences often don't overlap," and for the last two questions,

"By carpet-bombing the internet with E-bombs."

Naturally.

I'm only pseudo-famous, and it only pseudo-helps

Before I wrote my first Rails tutorial and cheat sheet, I was a nobody. Nobody had the faintest clue who I was. Nobody (and I mean absolutely *nobody*) read my blog. And there was no *reason* for anyone to know me... or to read my blog. I didn't create much of anything and I didn't put myself out there.

So how do *you* know me? Probably because of my Rails cheat sheets and tutorials, from way back when. Maybe you read them yourself, or you were introduced to me by someone who did.

Or maybe you found me on Hacker News or some other entrepreneurship feed. Maybe you found me through my posts on my new blog, Unicorn Free, or one of my interviews,

or heard somebody mention this class at a user group.

Maybe you found out about my entrepreneurship class after you took a JavaScript class taught by me & Thomas. (Who has taught lots of folks how to make sexy JavaScript animations, thanks to his Scriptaculous framework.)

The common thread here is: *learning*. Whether it was an interview, a blog post, a cheat sheet, or another class, you met me because I was helping you *learn* something. Or *do* something.

When I started this teaching thing, I had nothing and nobody. Now I have a pretty decent audience. But — and this is important — *I don't have a huge one*. Case in point: Unicorn Free only has 2,000 subscribers as of today.

I just know how to make the most of a small audience (and keep building it, & building it, & building it...)

How I Capture Attention by Dropping E-Bombs

I can't come up for a marketing strategy for you. But I can tell you how I come up with mine.

The next 3 pages are a crash course in making E-Bombs.

(PS — Other, less fun people call this educational marketing, or content marketing. If you want more info, google those terms!)

Building an E-Bomb

1 **Identify Opportunities Around Your Product**

Draw on your customer research/personal experience: what things do people struggle with? Not know? Seek help with? (Must be related to your product!)

EXAMPLE: Tips on how to handle bad clients, for a time tracking product aimed at freelancers

2 **Create Educational, "I Rule!" Experiences**

Write insightful comments, blog posts, tutorials, create screencasts, slide decks, cheat sheets, micro-sites, calculators, reports, white papers, mini-guides, live webinars, office hours. Help them "get it" and feel smart & capable.

3 **Set Them Free — & Subtly Branded**

Tweet about them. Blog about them. Email people. Leave blog & forum comments. Always mention your product, casually in the middle and at the end.

Bonus if you can say "I created x product because this shouldn't be so hard/tough/painful/costly."

4 **Ask for the Sale (or at least the email)**

Yup, ask for it. Say, "Did this help? Then you'll love product x." Or, if you want to build your list, "Get more free reports/advice/checklists, enter your email here!"

5 **Start All Over Again**

A product marketer's work is *never* done.

Maximizing a Small Audience

1 ## Offer Special Discounts to the "In Group"

Treat your loyal customers, readers, & mailing list subscribers special and they'll repay the favor. Give them early dibs, extra goodies, and discounts.

2 ## Always Be List-Building

Email lists are powerful, under-utilized, and very effective — yes, even for nerdy audiences. Keep asking folks to join. Then reward them with goodies. This goes both for existing customers/blog readers/etc and new prospective ones.

We collected over 1000 email addresses for Freelancember.com and 1000 for TimeBeMoney.com.

3 ## Teach, About Your Product

"The Building Of" or "The Marketing Of" or "x Mistakes" or "x Lessons" posts are huge. Everybody loves 'em. They're a great way to mention your product, too — and make some more sales. Ideal when your audience includes fellow makers.

4 ## Create New Goodies on the Regular

Unicorn Free started out with about 30 subscribers, by the end of the first year I had 1,400. That's 144x growth. (Today: over 13,000.) There's no such thing as "done" when it comes to your marketing, you need to constantly be doing something. (But it doesn't have to be *something new*!)

5 ## Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

There will always be new people who want to learn the basics, who didn't read all your back blog issues, who didn't catch the timely microsite. Repackage and reproduce content. Spin it a diff way. Don't be caught up in the obsession with new.

Mining for E-Bomb Material

So, how do you figure out what *you* can use to make a killer e-bomb? You already have everything you need to get started! Sales Safari to the rescue once again.

E-Bombs are made up of the same source material as products: Where's the pain? Where's the money? What keeps them up at night? What frustrates them? What are they searching for, trying to learn?

When you make a tool or an educational product that's based on *value*, you'll find yourself in a universe of potential e-bomb material:

- If they need a project management tool, then they're interested in learning about how to PM without tears, work in teams, hit deadlines.
- If they need a tool to help them manage freelance billing, well, you know they crave a more successful, less stressful freelance practice.
- If they need screencasts to learn how to design or program, you already know what they want to learn.

Fear of the Free

"Well," I hear you saying, "that's all well and good, but what if I give some stuff away for free and then *nobody buys*!?"

First off, don't worry: You're only going to give away a piece of the pie. Small, actionable bits. (Just like the free samples you can taste in your local grocery store.)

Or, in the case of tools & software, you're only going to give away something *related* to the pie. Like a pie server and a pie plate and a guide to taking pro-quality photographs of pie — *not* the pie itself.

Second off, real-life experience proves it: Giving away free stuff makes sales go whoooooooa! People who value their time will *always* want more — more guidelines, more hand-holding, more structure, more facts, more narrative, more insider tips, more advice. And they're ready to pay for it.

Just don't give away the whole cow, and be sure your product truly does Kill Pain or Multiply Money, and you'll be good.

But I'm Not an Expert…

Stuff and nonsense! When you find yourself thinking this sly little thought, stop it in its tracks.

You do not have to be an expert to teach, teach well, and profit from it. *You just have to know a little bit more than somebody.*

You don't have to know more than *everybody*. Not even *most people*.

Just *somebody*.

In fact, when you are learning yourself is an ideal time to start teaching, while your own questions & hiccups are still fresh in your mind. Others will often find your fellow newbhood to be charming, engaging, and helpful.

What if you don't know more than them? You still have nearly infinite teaching potential. See the sidebar for a list of ideas! This is only a sampling; the options are infinite.

Sometimes the best way to teach is not to teach, but to give away goodies. Build your rep & your audience with

Powerful E-Bomb Strategies

- Make a complex, scary topic seem easier & more accessible
- Get serious, no BS about big risks
- Air out common fears — yours & theirs
- Collect a bunch of resources together in one place
- Write reviews of existing resources/strategies
- Draw dots between different facts
- Zoom into the tiny details
- Zoom out to the big, broad view
- Tell stories about your experience
- Share opinions (and justify them)
- Create cheat sheets, worksheets, reports, link posts, posters, checklists…
- Turn written content into audio/video
- Turn audio/video into written content
- Provide a map or a timeline
- Make tools to support thinking, processes, management or decision-making
- Do interviews
- Talk strategy when others talk "facts"
- Talk facts when others talk strategy
- Tell it & teach it a different way
- Help folks who are left out of the current discourse/way of teaching
- Hold a live class or "webinar"
- Create study-at-home materials
- Hold a contest for stories, tips or questions
- Document "the obvious" for newbies

code samples, open source, templates, samples — whether you're talking about mini-screencasts, or Photoshop design elements, or code libraries, plugins, or other developer resources.

The #1 Secret to Fame & Successful Marketing…

…is to create a plan and a schedule, and stick to it. The biggest mistake most people make is to "try" marketing techniques haphazardly.

You can absolutely build a business by marketing 1 to 3 days a month. All you need to do is to ensure that those days happen regularly, on a schedule, within a larger plan, and that you are constantly adjusting your strategy based on what you learn.

Marketing is a snowball: it takes time and you just have to keep pushing.

For a while, it won't seem like you're getting anywhere… then one day, you'll realize you've got a huge honkin' snowball and it'll start rolling on its own.

So brainstorm a list of 12 things that your Audience wants & needs to learn. Decide how you'd like to deliver that content (written? slides? cheat sheets? report? webinar? interview? podcast?). Then create an editorial calendar with 2 to 4 pieces of marketing material per month.

Use the worksheet on the next page to brainstorm.

Closing the Loop: Ask for the Sale

Any e-bomb helps you grab Attention and generate Interest.

But without a follow-up, you're missing *Action*… and probably Desire.

Use what you learned writing your Pitches to sell people on your product at the end of each e-bomb: a mini pain/dream/ fix pitch that'll get them either buying, or subscribing to your newsletter for more free goodies (and a discount).

An e-bomb without a pitch is no e-bomb at all: it's simply free stuff you're giving away, with no strategy behind it.

Feeling awkward? Don't. Remember: your product is *good news.*