

Who's winning the persuasion game in your business?

Most people know that "PERSUASION" means getting someone to say YES. It means getting someone to believe something or do something you want them to.

PRE-suasion is the process of arranging for recipients to be receptive to a message **before** they encounter the message.

Preparation is the key...

The highest achievers spend more time crafting what they do-and-say before making a request of a customer.

They don't rely on the legitimate merits of an offer to get it accepted; they recognise that the psychological frame in which an appeal is first placed can carry equal or even greater weight.

Questions are one PRE-suasion way of PREparing someone for your persuasive message by bringing attention to something that PREdisposes your customer to your message and your products and services:

What questions are you asking customers to prepare them for making a decision about buying your product or service?

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STOP thinking you can influence people after they've made a decision

START choosing questions and anchors that direct attention before a decision is made

1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH QUESTION' you must ask to help you put the power of influence to work for your business...

Questions are one PRE-suasion way of PREparing someone for your persuasive message by bringing attention to something that PREdisposes your customer to your message and your products and services:

Here's Professor Cialdini defining pre-suasion:

"Know how to set the stage and get the desired result"

So, pre-suasion is learning what to say or do BEFORE making a request from someone. There are ways of making people more open or willing to say yes to you... before you make a request, offer or proposal.

By taking advantage of a human tendency, certain questions elicit desired answers and influence decisions because the questions anchor a person to positive associations with your product.

PRE-suasion and the magic of questions:

If a stranger ever approaches you and asks:

"Do you feel unhappy?"

Beware – there's a good chance that this isn't an innocent question.

In fact, this is exactly the kind of question a cult recruiter is likely to ask!

Questions like this are designed to take advantage of our natural tendency to focus on what is present (unhappy), rather than what is missing (happy). As a result, these questions PREsuade, they have you focused on anything making you unhappy at the time. This is one step down a conversation that could see you sharing all the problems you're facing – exactly what a cult recruiter wants.

'Pre-suasion' is the art of influence by capturing and channelling attention to move people in your direction so that they are more willing to agree with your idea or offer **before** they encounter it!

Rather than trying to change what people think (difficult), try changing what they think about instead, by setting the stage and directing their attention. The changed focus of their attention primes, anchors, frames and sets the agenda for subsequent choices. Smart influence happens before any message is sent.



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Pre-suasion may be controversial for traditional communicators – it argues that influence is primarily a game of attention and association, not persuasion and argument.

Pre-suasion focuses on ***when to influence***. And that time is before people notice they are being influenced.

So, it pays to ask yourself:

Where is the value in this question?

The value in this question lies in ***identifying*** the questions you're using (or should be using) to create the fertile ground in which a customer makes a decision in your favour.

What questions are you asking customers to prepare them for making a decision about buying your product or service?

2. The ethics of influence

Facebook, Apple, Google, Microsoft and many other hyper-successful companies take the science of habit very seriously – they're doing what they can to influence your behaviours. It's why you're asked to subscribe to notifications, it's why there's a red circle telling you how many messages await your attention on your phone!

Every company that uses advertising is influencing your behaviour too. Shop windows are influencing what you do too. Sponsorship of sports stars is also a way of influencing you.

Influence is everywhere!

Abuse the power of influence though and you'll be held to account by your customers. The challenge is knowing what is ethically acceptable and what is not.

But the bottom line is – your customers aren't dummies!

Treat your customers with respect whilst using pre-suasion and the skills of influence and you'll probably be OK. Market and sell your products and services in a way that disrespects your customers and you cross the line. Even considering unethical behaviours means you're risking using influence in a way that will back-fire on you and you will be found out.

The risks are too high...

Get found out in the world of social media we now live in and this means your business will have a firestorm of bad press resulting in a very short shelf life!

A practical example and a fair question:

A clothing shop has to lay out their clothes in some way or other. So why not have the expensive suits or new-release, limited-edition, expensive trainers at the front of the store? This means that the clothing and footwear seen further inside the store seems more reasonably priced and worth buying. The question is – is this unethical or just good business?

It's hard to know where the limits lie.

But being conscious of ethical choices and respecting your customers will stand you in good stead.

Deeper discussions...

The science of behavioural economics and the ethical obligations that go hand-in-hand with the use of the tools of influence are discussed in some depth here:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057240.2014.883709>

This article reviews four of the most notable books on this subject in the last decade which provide you with further research should you want to go even deeper.

3. Cialdini's 6 powerful tools of influence...

Robert Cialdini's landmark publication has to be a must-read for everyone in business.

For anyone responsible for marketing and selling his or her company's products and services it should be a sackable offence if this book is not read! Forgive the melodrama but this is a must-read for anyone in sales and marketing. Particularly anyone wanting to master their use of words. In brief you'll find Cialdini shares many examples of the power of these six tools of influence:

1) SCARCITY – people want more of which they can't have

Teenagers take to smoking because their parents have forbidden them. Limited time offers get a bigger response than open-ended offers. Limited availability (music banned by the BBC) makes something more appealing. Sshhh - it's a secret! - information in short supply is deemed to be more valuable information!

EXAMPLE: A business was promoting their business growth services at an event with 54 business-owners present. They cleverly decided to limit the number of available appointments in the coming month to just 7. These 7 were snapped up and the surplus enquiries were scheduled the month after, and the month after that.

These appointments have since generated in excess of £70,000 in new revenue for the business and a flow of additional referrals. Scarcity works.

2) RECIPROCITY – give first before you take

When you receive an unexpected Christmas card or gift you feel a pressing urge to send them one back, don't you? Receive a gift and you'll feel an obligation to do something in return.

EXAMPLE: A business was disappointed with the response they were getting from their customer survey process. So, they put 'give and take' to work. They tested the inclusion of a chocolate bar in half the surveys sent out. The surveys with the chocolate bar more than doubled the response to the surveys. Reciprocity (give and take) works.

3) LIKING – Its common sense isn't it?

People like dealing with people they like. And they like people who are like themselves.

EXAMPLE: Why do you happily wear business dress when your customer wears business dress? As opposed to the doubt you hold in your mind about whether your business dress is appropriate when seeing another customer who wears jeans and a T-shirt. This is your antenna working overtime on the liking front - you know you're overdressed, and it may put your customer off, so you dress down, take off your jacket and roll up your shirtsleeves!

4) **AUTHORITY – why do more people follow a suited man across a busy street of traffic than a man in t-shirt and jeans?**

Because the suited man has more authority. Likewise, a white lab coat in a hospital setting comes with high degrees of authority too.

EXAMPLE: When a doctor recently treated the father of a friend in hospital he turned up without a white coat or a stethoscope – he investigated the father's notes, interviewed him thoroughly, examined him very well and made his diagnosis.

Our friend was unsure he was correct and asked the next doctor to come along if they could see the consultant – they were merrily advised that they'd JUST seen him! His casual dress code undermined his authority in their inexperienced eyes!

5) **CONSISTENCY AND COMMITMENT – Most people are uncomfortable if they are inconsistent in their decisions and choices**

If a buyer chooses to read a blog on your website and then downloads a report, they have taken two small steps on the road to buying from you.

Making small decisions in your favour can and does lead onto bigger decisions in your favour in the future – decisions often follow a consistent course and form a commitment over time.

EXAMPLE: In his book Cialdini describes the results from asking a group of homeowners to put, in their front garden, a large public billboard reading DRIVE CAREFULLY. The number of homeowners prepared to do this were mainly very poor – only 17% said yes. Another group, however, reacted more favourably where 76% said yes, they would display the billboard.

So why were the second group more willing to agree? This second group, two weeks earlier, had received a request to place a 3-inch square sticker in their door or front window saying – BE A SAFE DRIVER. It was such a trifling request the vast majority said yes and in doing so they'd made a small commitment, a small step. When the second request came along for the large billboard two weeks later, consistency meant they said yes again – or at least 76% did, almost 60% more than the other group.

Sample cheese off the cheese counter and you're more likely to buy some cheese (and here's reciprocity at work also). Can you see how this has implications for creating multi-step marketing offers – free reports, followed by 'attend an event' invitation, followed by a FREE meeting followed by a substantial but consistent service offer.

It also has implications on the words you use and the questions you ask – questions are words after all. And questions are great at seeking small commitments and building consistency.



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6) SOCIAL PROOF – ‘8 out of 10 cat owners’ works as a marketing message because it is social proof at work

A busy restaurant gets even busier because social proof is at work. Testimonials work because they are a form of social proof – get a skip full of testimonials and you multiply the social proof in favour of your firm. Video testimonials work for the same reason. Having customers speak at your events – in your favour – works because it is social proof.

EXAMPLE: A professional service business holds an annual event and has customers as two of their presenters – the customers tell their story and how the firm has helped them, and they take questions from the audience about their experiences. The firm has run this event for three consecutive years and each event has successfully created more sales than their salespeople do in 3 months – social proof works.

Putting Cialdini’s 6 tools of influence to work...

Which of Cialdini’s 6 tools of influence could you focus on in your business to create the fertile ground in which a customer makes a decision in your favour?

Which of these 6 tools of influence would be the most powerful in pre-suading your customer to make a decision in your favour?

4. Steve Jobs (Apple) was brilliant at using ANCHORING...

Pre-suasion requires you to take seriously the magic of anchoring and priming. Just like Steve Jobs did.

Anchoring – also known as the focusing effect – is a bias in our attention where we systematically rely very heavily on the **first** piece of information we are offered (the “anchor”) when making decisions.

Priming refers to how our attention and responses are systematically biased by what we’ve **last** been exposed to.

The amount of influence, both priming (what we saw most recently - **LAST**) and anchoring (what we saw **FIRST**) means that you should take seriously what your customers see, hear or think before their decision.



Here is a great video showing how price anchoring was used by Steve Jobs to help sell the new iPad (at the time) – it’s what he says before he says what he wants to say that makes the new iPad look inexpensive:

<https://youtu.be/QUuFbrjvTGw>



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5. Priming Associations

Do you know the positive words, imagery and sounds that people associate with your products and services? No? Well you'll need to find out in order to become proficient in the art of pre-suasion. For example, if you want people to improve performance, first expose them to images and words associated with performance (win, attain, succeed, master).

These words, images and sounds are 'primers' that have 'associative coherence' with desired outcomes – readying our mind for an associated (positive) response. For instance, telephone fund-raisers raised 60% more money when the fund-raisers script sheet contained an image of a runner winning a race. We may dismiss motivation posters as 'cheesy', but they are proven to work. Likewise, young women do better on science, maths, and leadership tasks if assigned to rooms with cues (photos, for example) of women known to have mastered the tasks.

More generally, by embedding evocative associations in an initial framing message, you can prime how people respond to a subsequent message.

- If you're selling healthy food products what images would pre-dispose people to buy more? What sounds would you want to play? What smells do you want in/around your point-of-sale material?
- If you're selling German wines what music and what images do you want customers to see and hear?
- If you're promoting a 2-seater sports coupe what do you want customers seeing and hearing before they look or sit in or road test the car?
- If you're selling computer services that save people time what do you want your customers to see or hear before they consider your products or services?
- What about your products and services? What images, sounds, smells or questions do you want to use prior to customers making a decision?

The practical upshot. Map out positive associations – word associations and sensory associations (sounds, tastes, scents, touch and sights) related to your product and benefits and use these positive associations to pre-suade your customers by priming.

6. Cialdini's 4-step influence framework

Professor Robert Cialdini's two landmark books on the art and science of persuasion and influence (see below) are crammed with practical research and examples. In pulling the two studies together Cialdini suggests a 4-step framework that enables you to put the power of persuasion to work effectively:

- 1) Capture and channel attention by using **6 strategies for appealing to buyers** (the sexual, the threatening, the different, the self-relevant, the unfinished and lastly the mysterious). Choose one of these influences that has positive associations with your product or service (you'll find much more on these 6 strategies in Cialdini's book 'Pre-suasion').
- 2) Then use **Liking** (the obligations of friendship, or of being swayed by people you like) and **Reciprocity** (the obligation to give back) to establish a sense of connection (rapport).

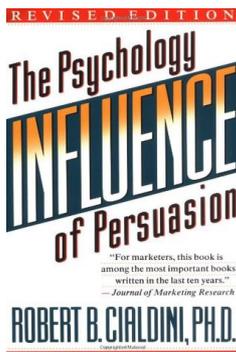
As well as *Liking* and *Reciprocity* here, there's also creating of a sense of **Unity** between communicator and audience to help establish and cement rapport and positivity.

Your job is also to cultivate a positive association with you as a communicator – in a meaningful, unexpected, and bespoke way. Build a sense of unity by creating 'we' messages that appeal to a sense shared identity (genealogy or geography) or shared activity (synchronicity, collaboration).
- 3) Now use **Authority** (we follow those we view as experts) and **Social Proof** (the power of consensus, doing what we feel others are also doing) to reduce feelings of uncertainty and risk.
- 4) Finally, use **Consistency** (need for personal alignment) and **Scarcity** (we want what may not be available) to motivate action.

This 4-step framework shows you how to put pre-suasion techniques together to craft compelling messages about your products and services. You'll then be communicating more effectively with your customers (and future customers) and put the power of pre-suasion to work for your business.

7. The book and other resources

Check out these 2 brilliant books by Robert Cialdini.

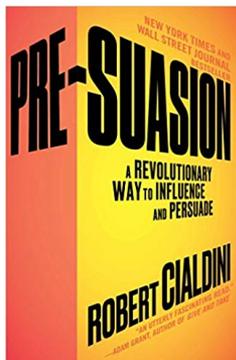


Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion

You'll learn the six universal principles, how to use them to become a skilled persuader—and how to defend yourself against them. Perfect for people in all walks of life, the principles of *Influence* will move you towards profound personal change and act as a driving force for your success.

The Journal of Marketing Research said: "For marketers and business owners this book is among the most important books written in the last ten years."

Here is a link to buy the book: <http://bit.ly/Influencebk>



Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade

Cialdini's revelatory new insights into the art of winning people over: it isn't just what we say or how we say it that counts, but also what goes on in the moments before we speak.

Forbes, the global media company, said: "An essential tool for anyone serious about science-based business strategies. **PRE-SUASION** is an instant classic. The book belongs on the shelf of anyone in business, from the CEO to the newest salesperson."

Here is a link to buy the book: <http://bit.ly/presuasionbk>

Here's Robert Cialdini describing (in less than 2 minutes) the reason for his book Pre-suasion – it puts things into an easy-to-understand focus:

<https://youtu.be/o-Kqb6Xvzow>



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Check out these 2 more substantial videos by Robert Cialdini:

The Power on Persuasion: Watch Cialdini explain brilliantly that the best persuaders spend more time crafting what they do and say before making a request.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e57X7GCFafo>



The Science of Influence: Cialdini explains some of the secrets to influencing someone to adopt your point of view.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNxDinw_Kjo

