

Use Humor To Connect With Prospects, Increase Trust

by **Trey Ryder**

© Copyright 2004-2005 by Trey Ryder LLC. All rights reserved.

Trey Ryder is a law-firm consultant who specializes in Education-Based Marketing for attorneys. He offers lawyers three free articles by e-mail: 11 Deadly Assumptions That Kill Your Marketing Program, Marketing Secrets of a Powerful Web Site, and 17 Fatal Marketing Mistakes Lawyers Make. To receive these articles, send your name and e-mail address to trey@tre Ryder.com and ask for his free e-mail packet of articles.

If you want prospective clients to trust you and believe you, you must help them connect with you as a living, breathing human being. Humor is one of the most powerful ways to form a strong emotional bond with prospects. It is an essential tool in persuasive communication. Humor brings both you and your marketing message to life!

When used skillfully...

- Humor brings your prospect over to your side and helps him see you as a friend.
- Humor builds an atmosphere of trust.
- Humor helps your prospect enjoy your message.
- Humor (specifically, laughter) produces endorphins, which creates in your prospect a sense of well being.
- Humor engages and entertains your prospect in a positive, uplifting way.
- Humor releases tension by physically and mentally relaxing both you and your prospect.
- Humor makes your prospect more receptive to new ideas.
- Humor helps you present important and even controversial ideas in a non-threatening manner.
- Humor seizes and holds your prospect's attention throughout your presentation.
- Humor helps your prospect cope and get through threatening situations.
- Humor helps convey difficult messages and focuses attention on serious topics.
- Humor makes heavy material lighter and easier to digest.
- Humor makes key points easier to remember.
- Humor shows that you don't take yourself too seriously.

WHEN TO USE HUMOR

First, I'm not suggesting that you use humor in every situation. Depending on the type of law you practice, you might be talking with a prospect who has experienced a personal tragedy. So you be the judge. If you think humor is not appropriate, then avoid it.

Now, whether you're presenting a seminar, or talking one-on-one with a prospect, here's how to get the most mileage from jokes and funny stories.

Opening: A joke or funny story helps prospects shift their attention from whatever was going on before -- to where you want their attention: on you.

During: If your subject is heavy or technical, insert something funny every ten minutes or so. This helps prospects relax and take a short break from their heavy concentration.

Closing: You want prospects to leave with a pleasant, positive feeling -- and a smile on their face. Make sure you close with a great joke or story.

WHERE TO FIND MATERIAL

The most effective humor is in stories about your own experiences. Look for personal, self-effacing stories where the joke is on you.

Also, you can draw jokes and stories from publications. If you look in current newspapers and magazines, you may find that your prospects have already heard the jokes and stories. To avoid this problem, you might check in publications dated several years earlier.

The source I use most often for funny stories is Reader's Digest. The material is superb and clean. And you can usually adapt the story to suit your needs.

By far, the largest source of funny stories and jokes is the internet. Recently, I was looking for the setup to a joke for which I could remember only the punch line. I did a search for the punch line and, believe it or not, the joke appeared on the screen.

11 TIPS ON HOW TO USE HUMOR

Tip #1: Humor is a serious subject. Don't take it lightly.

Tip #2: Use self-effacing humor. You are always safe when you make yourself the butt of the joke. This helps you appear human to your prospect -- and you don't risk offending him in any way.

Tip #3: Avoid intellectual humor unless you're sure your prospect will understand it. It's easy to tell a story that's so high-brow that it goes over your prospect's head. Instead, I like silly stories, which usually reach the lowest common denominator.

Tip #4: Make sure your prospect can relate to your story's topic. If you want to meet your prospect eye to eye, your story must focus on something that is within your prospect's knowledge or experience.

Tip #5: Use stories and jokes that relate directly to the topic of your presentation.

Tip #6: Make sure your story or joke is clear and to the point.

Tip #7: Check your story or joke against the AT&T principle: Is it appropriate? Is it tasteful? Is it timely?

Tip #8: Make sure the topic of your story doesn't reflect on your knowledge or competence. We're striving for unquestioned credibility, so don't say anything that could undermine your prospect's confidence in you.

Tip #9: Practice and perfect your joke or funny story. Look for ways to make the story appear spontaneous. Then connect it with the most important parts of your marketing message.

Tip #10: Focus on the story's pace, intonation and pauses. Often, the silent pauses in stories are as funny as the punch lines.

Tip #11: Never use humor that is -- or might be perceived to be -- in bad taste. This includes anything relating to race, gender, religion, ethnic origin or disability. Make sure your jokes and stories are squeaky clean.

After these tips, I can't close without a story. Here's one of my favorites:

One night, thinking no one is home, a burglar breaks into a house. He discovers the frightened owners in bed watching TV.

"What's your name?" he asks menacingly of the wife at gunpoint.

"E-E-Elizabeth," she replies.

"This is your lucky day," says the burglar. "I can't shoot anyone named Elizabeth because that was my dear mother's name." He turns to the husband and demands, "What's your name?"

"My name's Harry," says the man. "But all my friends call me Elizabeth."