

**Marketing Star****Denise Patrick: Senior Marketing Counsel for Pierpont Communications**

By Anique Gonzalez

"I hate the word 'quality.' You know, I'm like, 'I'll give you a dollar if you can bring me one of your brochures that does not have the word quality in it.' What does that mean?" Denise Patrick stated. She elaborated, "Who puts out an ad that says, 'Oh, and by the way, we're not friendly, we don't offer good service, and we don't return your phone calls in a timely manner.' No one says that. I mean, when you tell me that you have fast, friendly, quality service, yeah, well, so does this guy."

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Patrick, who is senior marketing counsel for Pierpont Communications, did not graduate college anticipating a future career in marketing, although she had been interested in the field from the time she was a child. During school, she majored in philosophy and soon thereafter began a job as a file clerk. She joked, "I guess because I knew the alphabet—that's how I got the job." It wasn't until she was in the employment manager's office and saw a job for a marketing research librarian that the marketing bug genuinely began to take hold.

After obtaining the marketing research librarian position, which she said she talked her way into, Patrick went on to hold several other marketing-related positions before joining Pierpont. She went into sales, serving as U.S. sales and marketing director for El Presidente Hotels, and retail, with a position at Superior Waterbeds. She then went on to work for a small agency and finally founded her own.

"I had a friend that I had met at a networking group who said, 'Have you ever thought about starting your own business?' I was like, 'Okay.' I was a single mother with two kids; I really don't know what I was thinking." Most entrepreneurs seek to venture out on their own in order to be in control of their time. However, Patrick explained, this is often not the case.

"You know that old joke," she said. "Being an entrepreneur is the only time you'll work 80 hours per week to avoid working 40 hours for someone else."

While demanding, this experience taught her several vital marketing and life lessons, one of which involved her very first client, Larry Blackman. Blackman, who sold electrostatic air filters, contacted Patrick about his product, and the two developed a direct-marketing project to promote it. The campaign was so successful that it increased sales to 23 million units in just 18 months. Later, when Blackman decided to sell the company, he asked Patrick if she would like a lump sum or partial ownership of the company. She chose the former.

"I always called that one of my Entrepreneurial 101 lessons because he asked me if I wanted the \$750 retainer or if I wanted a piece of the business instead of the retainer. I took the \$750 dollars because I needed to pay the rent," she said.

Patrick is very much an introspective individual. She sees lessons and changes her trajectory accordingly in relation to many of the experiences, positive and negative, she has had thus far. Moreover, she hopes to impart these lessons to the upcoming generation of marketers so that they can learn from them as well.

"When working with people that are the age of my kids [in their 20s] I do think it's important to tell somebody honestly about what your experiences have been like. I think that's inspirational. Not necessarily that it's all been great, because it hasn't been. I didn't make any money when I sold my agency; I screwed that all up. It's a lesson," she said.

Q. What do you like to do in your free time?

A. I like watching TV, I paint, I do go to a lot of galleries and museums, and I hang out with my family. I'm really close still to all four of my brothers and my parents. I have a granddaughter and 13 nieces and nephews.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. AC/DC, *Back in Black*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I really did like *The Sopranos*, I loved *Gilmore Girls* before this last season, and I am a sucker for competitive reality shows.

Q. What was the last magazine you read?

A. *Adweek*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. It's a couple of different people on different things. I admire Oprah as an example of someone who just went with what she was meant for. You know what I mean. She didn't try to change herself, except to be better. In terms of women, I've really always admired Martha Stewart's entrepreneurship. That woman knows how to make a buck. Then there are people like David Chase and David Milch who just blow me away creatively. There are so many people like that.

Fortunately, at Pierpont all of her experiences have been positive ones. In her role there, she heads up the marketing practice, essentially building an agency within the company. However, working in this capacity is not always an easy task. The field has changed tremendously over the years, and it continues to change, bringing unique challenges for marketers.

"The biggest issue facing marketers today, I think, is the credibility issue," Patrick said. "We don't believe our people anymore, we don't believe anything, and we think it's stupid to start off believing. So if you, as an individual, feel like that, just think what your market feels like."

This is why Patrick hates the word "quality." Every company that creates an advertisement touts the quality of its service or product. Yet if the company doesn't back up that assertion with evidence (i.e., testimonials), consumers will not take the ad seriously or simply will not pay attention to it. There is no credibility, and there is no sense of sincerity in the ad; the company only wishes for you to buy the service or product. And the consumer immediately recognizes this and is resentful because of it.

According to Patrick, marketers can gain credibility by first and foremost recognizing that decisions to buy or refrain from buying products rest solely with the customers themselves. This allows marketers to create communications that listen to consumers, show that they care about their needs, and aren't pushy. If this is accomplished, customers will then be willing to listen to what marketers are trying to tell them.

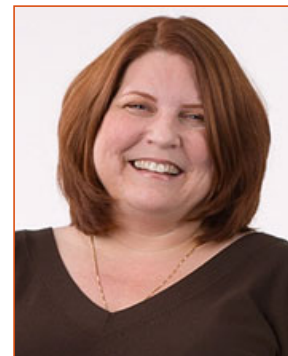
Honesty, of course, is also vital when trying to gain credibility with consumers.

"There are enough people in this world for everybody to get rich. There's not any reason for having to trick people," Patrick said.

Not tricking people means talking to your consumers as if they are your best friends. There's no need for big or fancy words, and there's definitely no need for manipulation. Marketers should merely inform. Telling consumers everything upfront lets them know that they are not being deceived, and that substantiates credibility.

Essentially, then, the role of marketers is rather straightforward.

"My job is to help the buyer hear the message enough so that they can make their own decision," Patrick affirmed.



Denise Patrick

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