

PERSUASION

"Introducing..."

Having someone else blow your trumpet for you can be a powerfully persuasive business tool, says Steve Martin

Social scientific studies have shown that in business settings people are more persuaded by a proposal if it comes from a credible and trustworthy source. But this fact also presents a problem. How do you introduce your expertise without being seen as a show-off?

You can hardly start a meeting or presentation by telling the audience that they should listen to and be persuaded by your arguments because of your greater knowledge, expertise and training. This approach will be more likely to turn your audience against you. A much better option is to have your expertise introduced by someone else, and some new research conducted at Stanford Business School has found that it doesn't matter if the person introducing you is connected to you and even stands to gain from your success.

This idea was tested recently in a series of estate agent offices that had both sales and letting departments. Customers who telephoned the offices would speak first with a receptionist, who asked which department they required. She not only told them who she was putting them through to, but mentioned her colleagues' credentials and expertise at the same time.

Customers interested in letting a property were told, "Lettings? I'll connect you with Sandra, who has over 15 years' experience letting properties in this area."



Similarly, customers who wanted more information about selling their property were put through to Peter: "He is our head of sales and has 20 years of experience selling properties."

It seems that the power of this expert introduction had a

The power of expert introductions had a significant influence on customers

significant influence over customers. The agency quickly reported a 20 per cent rise in the number of both quotations and subsequent appointments.

Here are some notable features of this intervention. Firstly, everything the receptionist tells her customers is true,

but for Sandra or Peter to tell the customers would be seen as boastful and self promoting. Second, and consistent with the Stanford Business School research, it doesn't seem to matter that the introduction comes from a colleague who will benefit from such an introduction. Thirdly, it is important to note that the intervention was both simple and costless to implement.

Proof, perhaps, that when it comes to persuading customers and colleagues to say "yes", expert introductions could make for some big differences in our success. ●

Steve Martin is co-author of the international bestseller *Yes! 50 Secrets from the Science of Persuasion*. See our feature on page 40 for more information

TRENDWATCH

Design by committee

Once upon a time, saying that something was 'designed by committee' meant it was at best average but more likely dull and uninspired. But in the internet world, groupthink is now king. Following the success of MySpace as a platform to launch new music, companies are giving their creative team a rest and looking to online communities for ideas...

CoProducer is a collaborative movie-making project, where participants offer up ideas on anything from direction to casting, writing, plots, post-production and lighting. Stakeholders get a share of 5 per cent of the film's profits.

Sellaband is where music fans and bands join forces to make music and go into business together. Fans buy shares of the music that they like on the website and, when the artist's support reaches £25,000, they can record an album and start selling it.

Authonomy is an initiative from HarperCollins, where aspiring writers put up to 10,000 words of their novels online to be commented on by the public. Highly rated writers get a book deal.

Adopt a Designer is a scheme from Catwalk Genius in Ireland where fashion fans can buy a share in a designer from £10 and get a percentage of future profits as well as having limited editions created for them.

Even **Walkers Crisps** are in on the act. They've launched a search for a new flavour for their crisps (as if they couldn't do it themselves) in return for one per cent of future sales and a big cash prize.

Laura Dixon

