



MARKETING STAR



Mark Stevens, CEO of MSCO, Inc., and Bestselling Author of *Your Marketing Sucks* and *Your Management Sucks*, Brings Unconventional Wisdom to the Marketing Game

[By Kenneth Davis]

Notable marketing expert and image consultant Mark Stevens said that many people have the wrong idea of what a real salesperson actually does and mistakenly believe that selling is easy.

"There's a huge difference between order-taking and selling," Stevens said. "You're not a salesperson because it says 'salesperson' on your card. You're only a salesperson if you actually are able to close a sale. It often looks easy because you see people selling something like Coca-Cola, for example. It's a very established brand, and people know what it is and need to refill their shelves. Most of those people are not really salespeople; they're order-takers. If you want to be a salesperson, then you have to sell something. You have to create demand."

As founder and CEO of MSCO—a global results-driven marketing and management firm—Stevens advises his clients on how to create demand for their products through good marketing and sales strategies.

"What we do is advise our clients on marketing and selling across the board—how [...] they grow their businesses through great salesmanship and great marketing," Stevens said. "We do all the marketing lectures, we develop the marketing strategy, and then we create all the tools for marketing, such as websites, events, and PR."

MSCO, which is based in White Plains, NY, specializes in strategy and integrated marketing solutions. The firm boasts an impressive roster of clients, including Nike, Starwood, General Electric, Guardian Life, Intrawest, Estee Lauder, and many others.

Through integrated marketing campaigns, MSCO focuses on achieving results for its clients. Stevens advises corporations on methods for achieving results and growth at various stages of the business lifecycle.

Stevens established MSCO 13 years ago after spending nearly 20 years building and running a number of different companies. He said his experiences dealing with marketing companies motivated him to open his own marketing firm.

"I was always hiring these companies to help me take these businesses to the next level," he said. "I hired them—from the giants on Madison Avenue down to local firms—and they all sucked because they were aesthetically driven. They didn't understand how to sell something, and they didn't understand how to grow something. They

could make pretty pictures, but they couldn't sell anything. Because at the end of the day, good marketing has to make sure that something gets sold, so I founded the firm on that basis, and that's what we do. We're about 40 people, and our focus is return on investment; and return on investment can only happen if something gets sold. I'm a big believer in IBM founder Tom Watson's statement that nothing happens unless a sale is made. And we've always been driven by that."

In addition to running MSCO, Stevens is also an author. He has written several bestselling business-related books, including *Your Marketing Sucks* and *Your Management Sucks*. His forthcoming book, *God Is a Salesman*, will be published in 2007. He's also an in-demand speaker at organizations such as Nike, Oracle, and the Culinary Institute of America.

Stevens discussed the skills that he believes a person needs to become a successful marketer or salesperson:

"To be successful in both you have to be driven," he said. "You have to be imaginative; you have to be creative in the standpoint of not necessarily creative like an artist but creative in the standpoint of what's the best way to actually sell something. Rather than following a cookbook that tells you how to sell a particular piece of software, for

Q. Do you have any hobbies or interests?

A. I love to ski and hike. I love to write books. I like philosophy, and I like to drink good wine.

Q. What CD is currently in your CD player?

A. *Chasing Cars* by Snow Patrol.

Q. What's the last magazine you read?

A. *The Economist*.

Q. What's your favorite TV show?

A. I'll probably make a lot of enemies for this, but Bill O'Reilly.



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example, how do you reinvent the standard way we use to sell so that you can be even more effective? You have to be able to dream. What I mean by that is you have to think about what nobody else is thinking about. It's easy to follow conventional wisdom, but conventional wisdom runs out of steam and leaves you without true imagination and without finding out a better way to get something done."

He added that a good salesperson needs to be able to control the agenda.

"You're often told that when a salesperson goes in to see somebody, you go in and ask them what they need," Stevens said. "I don't believe that. I think the first thing you should do is go in and tell them why they need you."

Stevens also believes that a person's likeability has no bearing on whether they'll be a good salesperson.

"A lot of people say I'd be good in sales because I'm friendly and people like me," he explained. "That doesn't make any difference. They have to write you out a check, and there's a huge gap between someone liking you and writing you out a

check. I think you want somebody who's strong and opinionated and not someone who's just nice."

Stevens went to C.W. Post College at Long Island University and said he studied "whatever I thought was the easiest thing to pass." After he graduated, Stevens went to live in Paris for a while, where he said he "went to discos every night and drank every night." But once he got back to the states, he decided to get serious and become an entrepreneur. At 21, he started his first business.

"I looked around and saw that not enough attention was paid to the small business community in the United States and all of the news and information that was being generated was for the CEOs of big companies," he said. "So I created a little mini enterprise devoted to providing intellectual content to small businesses. And I started writing books on small businesses and giving speeches and selling information on small businesses. Then I just migrated from there to running companies."

Stevens discussed what he enjoys most about his job:

"I think there's nothing more rewarding in life than growing companies," he said. "So taking a company from zero dollars to \$10 million, from \$10 million to \$100 million, from a billion to \$2 billion, that's extremely rewarding."

Stevens was born in New York City. He's been married for 33 years and has two grown sons; one is a successful real estate broker, and the other is on Wall Street.

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