

## Just Do It: How to Create a Memorable Tagline

by Carrie Shearer

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Taglines position your brand. They are a few descriptive words that set your business apart from the competition and arouse interest in your product or service.

Exceptional taglines can remind potential customers about your brand without mentioning your product, service, or company name. Among the first ones that come to my mind are these: "When you care enough to send the very best," "The quicker picker-upper," "We try harder," and "Just do it!" (Hallmark, Bounty, Avis, and Nike, respectively).

Simply hearing the tagline makes me think of the product it describes. In fact, for Bounty, I don't think of the manufacturer, but simply the product. Basically, a tagline should communicate your company's positioning. What is the unique benefit that your product or service offers your target audience? Remember the 7-Up tagline "The Uncola"? These two words clearly identified the positioning of 7-Up as different from cola drinks. It was memorable because at the time the words could not have been used to describe another soft drink.

That characteristic is vital to a good tagline: It is clear which product it defines. In fact, the test of a good tagline is that it would not make sense if it were used to describe a competitor's product. Avis's tagline is an excellent example of using something particular about a product—in this case, being the No. 2 rental car company—and using it to define itself to its potential customers.

[Michael Goodman](#), president of Dialogue Marketing Group, put it this way in a recent interview:

*"Typically, a tagline is used to communicate or explain the main positioning benefit the company or brand provides—especially when the company/brand name doesn't do a particularly good job of communicating that message. In that case, it's important to go back to the positioning statement and make sure the target audience is clearly and narrowly defined, and the benefit is really one that's important to that target audience..."*

*Simply looking for a "catchy tagline" that customers and potential customers will remember is like looking for a joke to open a show. It's quickly forgotten unless the subject matter and substance are important to the target audience. Better to start with Marketing 101. Develop an overall marketing strategy and*

*a solid positioning statement, and use those as the basis for communicating what's important for the business/brand."*

What makes one tagline better than another? **They are short, pithy, and easy to remember.** As a general rule, taglines should be short and sweet, yet descriptive enough to get your message across. In many ways, they function as a three-second billboard.

The goal of a tagline is to have your company's name or product be the first that potential customers think of when making a purchasing decision. Can you name a company other than DeBeers that makes diamond jewelry? Probably not. Why? Its tagline, "Diamonds are forever," is in magazines and TV and radio advertisements.

In 500 words, anyone could craft a compelling statement about a product. But the best taglines have fewer than 10:

- **They clearly state why your product or company is superior.** A good tagline immediately tells potential customers why your company is better than competitors. It allows you to distinguish your company from the competition. Polaroid achieved this with the tagline, "We don't have negatives." In the days before digital cameras, this four-word phrase clearly differentiated Polaroid from other camera manufacturers.
- **They provide a call to action.** If your tagline can suggest an example to the customer, it will resonate with potential customers. American Express's tagline, "Don't Leave Home Without it," has made the card an essential part of many people's wallet. Their message is that sensible people carry the American Express card. This creates the image of card members who are suave and sophisticated, something most people desire to be. In the days before Skype, cell phones, and email... AT&T's tagline, "Reach Out and Touch Someone," reminded people that although family and friends might be far away, there was no reason not to stay in touch.
- **They promote a positive feeling about your product or company.** Your tagline is your promise. Good taglines define the emotion that accompanies or is triggered by using your product. Consider Nike's "Just Do It!" tagline. This famous line boosts confidence in Nike products by simply communicating that using Nike products can improve your performance and enhance the self-confidence. Who wouldn't want to use such a product? Remember the old M&M tagline, "Melts in your mouth, not in your hands"? Who could quarrel with such a statement? It makes you suspend your belief and forget that although the chocolate doesn't melt in your hand, the hard candy shell does.

- **They create a sense that the product is greater than goods and services.** Apple does this quite effectively with its "Think Different" tagline. It makes a statement about the type of person who buys an Apple computer, defining that person as someone who thinks outside the box. Another company that successfully did this was IBM with the tagline for its Thinkpad, "I think, therefore, IBM." IBM's tagline intimates that those who have the capacity to think, purchase an IBM ThinkPad laptop.

Sometimes, it's good to get some outside feedback on a proposed tagline in development, and blogs and marketing forums are an ideal way of receiving input from marketing peers. For example, "the MarketingProfs Know-How Exchange Forum has dozens of experienced marketing experts who have addressed these issues for hundreds—maybe even thousands—of products, services, and companies, and they're ready to do it for you," says Goodman. Here are some tips for facilitating the process of coming up with a good tagline:

- **Define your positioning**

- What differentiates your product or services from your competitors?
- Why would customers purchase from your company rather than another one?

- **Define your target customers in detail**

- Who is your prime audience?
- What is their most important unmet need that your product or service can satisfy?

- **Define what you want your brand to represent**

- In the future, when someone hears your company or product name, what image should come to mind?

- Talk to your current customers to find out why they bought (or buy) from you. What is it about (your product or service) that appeals to them?

Engaging satisfied customers in the process of generating a tagline will help ensure that your tagline is unique and speaks to what differentiates your product in the eyes of your customers.

Thinking through these questions is the crucial first step to developing a tagline. Taglines are more than a clever set of words—they are a way to punctuate the key benefits your customers will realize by using your product. Before embarking on developing a tagline (either on your own or with assistance), Goodman recommends, "Ask yourself, 'How will I know when a tagline candidate is a winner?' What criteria will you use to determine which taglines are right... and which are not? The reason to ask this question before you begin the sifting process is that you're still in an objective strategic frame of

mind and you are not likely to be swayed by a very clever, but off-strategy tagline candidate.

### **The Best Way to Solicit Suggestions**

To get the most benefit from the KHE Forum or any other feedback loop, provide a clear picture of your positioning, target audience, and what you want your product or service to represent.

The following is an example of how this was done extremely well:

#### ***Definition of Positioning:***

*I own a midsize home-healthcare company in business for 20 years. I am looking for a memorable tagline that conveys our position. Our competitors are large hospitals and Visiting Nurses Association, which is the "Kleenex" of homecare and has been around for 100+ years. They market their technical expertise, "Quality u can trust," "We care," and "We put you first." We are smaller and more personal.*

#### ***Definition of the Brand and the Target Customer:***

*Our goal is to bring life into the home. For example, a lonely 90-year-old woman lives alone and has a wound. The doctor orders short-term home care. We'll heal the wound, but while we're there, we also focus on finding ways to bring vitality back to her life long after we're gone. We believe that everyone can live vibrantly on some level. We are holistic, fresh, and innovative. My dilemma is that I want a tagline that conveys this message while giving a clue as to the function of the company as well. Final dilemma: We need to appeal to a very broad audience: patient and family, other community health providers, discharge planners, and health care professionals.*

Since the asker had done such a great job of defining his company, its positioning, and the target market, 28 KHE Forum members responded. Forums are a great place to also test out a tagline. If you have a tagline or are choosing among a few, forums can be a wonderful resource.

Sometimes the suggestions you receive won't be exactly what you want, but they may help you find the right path. One KHE expert, [jpoyer](#), did this quite successfully for a person who posted a question. Her suggestion, "Your Loan Signing Authority" was adapted by the asker to "Your Local Loan Signing Specialist."

*Note: Special thanks to Michael Goodman for providing insight and guidance on this article.*