The Hidden Agenda
A proven way to win business and create a following
by Kevin Allen

http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Hidden-Agenda-Following-ebook/dp/B007JBBNKY

www.kevinallenpartners.com/video

THE BOOK IN A NUTSHELL

The key to winning business is to connect to their hidden agenda - their emotional desire. Show them how you can help them reach their agenda (better than others) and they will buy you.
THE BOOK

We all need to learn the art of ‘pitching’ as we all sell everyday. The key to winning business is to move from just a facts based rational argument to engaging your audience (via story) in how you can help them achieve their hidden agenda.

The author has helped win many new business advertising accounts, including AEG, Becks, China Mobile, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Ericsson, Johnson & Johnson, JP Morgan, L’Oreal, Lufthansa, Marriott, Mastercard, Microsoft, Nestle, Nokia, Opel, Pfizer, South African Airways, Unilever and Zanussi. When he inquired why they were given the business, the answer was often ‘Because you just got it’. What this meant was they got past the brief to the root ‘desire’ (what he calls The hidden agenda) and was then able to demonstrate how the agency could help them get it.

Kevin Allen was highly successful at new business because he used his natural intuition and empathy skills to build a closer understanding of these hidden needs, wants and desires of his clients.

The heart of the matter

You can’t convince, persuade or even hoodwink people. Instead you compel them to follow you by making a profound connection with the things which are of real importance for them.

People make decisions emotionally. Every person buys with their heart not their head (and inside their heart is the hidden agenda). At the root of every pitch is a human being with wants & needs, hopes & fears. Understand these; address these, and they will then buy from you. Successful selling is rooted in understanding the fundamental human truths that lie in the hearts of us all.

“It’s about desire...A mother may want a set of encyclopedias but she desires for her kid to become President”

Thus the central tenet of selling is to understand their emotional motivations – then show how you can deliver it. The hidden agenda is this unspoken emotional motivation that resides in the heart of the audience. This emotional core is the true motivator at the heart of every decision.

The business world tends to eschew emotionality as a sign of being ‘out of control’, weak, and lacking in ‘professionalism’. But emotion is prevalent in the business world – it’s just hidden. Thus you need to hunt out these emotional drivers and mould them with the rationally expressed business problem (as the hidden agenda lies behind the overtly expressed business issue).

The hidden agenda typically takes one of three forms: a want (which could either be ‘away from’ a fear/concern or ‘towards’ an ambition); a need (i.e. something is missing – it is the desire of longing) or a value (i.e. a deeply held belief that something is important to them). If the agency also shares those same values this forms a real point of connection.
A hidden agenda can be summarized in three parts: The subject (Typically ‘I’ or ‘We’), The emotional trigger (i.e. the core emotion at work e.g. fear, ambition, longing etc) and the referent (i.e. the issue that triggers the emotion). For example:

New York City anticrime campaign (Residents): “We need more than excuses and explanations; We need someone to fix the problem or we’re leaving!”
Smith Barney: “We value Standing up for what we think is right”
Mastercard (Client): “I need to be sure no mistakes are made that could cost me my promotion”
Mastercard (Consumer): "We are not reckless free spenders, we just want a good life for the people we care about”
Mastercard: “We need to score a victory over Visa in the marketplace and in doing so become famous for it… but the odds are stacked against us”
Marriott: “We want to succeed for our families and companies and will not give up in doing so”
Marriott: “We value the importance of being at the cutting edge of the lodging business, but do not compromise our values in the process”
Ericsson: “We want to be appropriately recognised for making a difference in the lives of people around the world because of what our business does”
Lufthansa: “We want to assert that we are the very best in the air but are concerned it may be seen as aggressive or arrogant”
Johnson & Johnson (Migraine): “We value the oath we took. This is not merely a marketing endeavor, but a journey towards making a difference in the lives of people who think there is no relief in sight”
Johnson & Johnson (HIV) (Patients): “We need to know that your intentions are good”
South African Airlines: “We want to be sure we do the right thing, because the eyes of the world are upon us”
OMO: “We want to be pioneers of new marketing pathways”
China Mobile: “We want to make this launch a success and will be known for doing so in a new way”
Irish Tourist Board: “We want people to experience the real Ireland. The warm, engaging spirit of the people who inhabit this beautiful place is the reason we’re special. The publicity about our country doesn’t tell the real story”

The conceptual target
A conceptual target is a group of people who share a powerful, driving common agenda - be it a value or a goal.

You need to develop a descriptor of the conceptual target audience which captures the core agenda of that group. Examples include Mum: The chief medical officer; Marriott: The road warrior; Mastercard: Good revolvers (i.e. wanting to provide the very best for the people that they loved); Ericsson: Everyday Heroes.

Thus in any pitch the first thing to focus on is the who not the what.
How to uncover the hidden agenda

The brief you are given is rarely the real brief so one needs to dig to find the hidden agenda. Who wins will be driven more by the hidden agenda than the espoused brief.

The search for the hidden agenda is the search for desire. Some of the key skills includes emotional insight, human sensitivity, thoughtfulness, empathy and excellent listening skills.

Suggested techniques include:
- Try to get as close as possible to your prospect. When you meet with them, make the focus on understanding them and their business (and less about trying to impress). It’s about forming a close (emotional) bond with them - one where they feel comfortable enough to reveal their hidden agenda.
- Step back in a conversation and observe how relaxed or tense the prospective client is.
- The art of active listening is like a gift to a person as it really acknowledges and validates the speaker (and builds trust and respect in the listener).
- Spend time exploring the background/situational analysis because this often has clues of the hidden agenda. Encourage the prospective clients to express a point of view and feelings on the subject. Ask questions that expose a want, need or value e.g. “If you had to write a corporate dream, what would it be?”, “What keeps you up at night?”, “What stands in your way?”, and “What would you say is your company’s noble calling?”. It’s also worthwhile conducting a laddering exercise, where one asks “Why?” five times.
- Study emails, company reports, speeches, websites, brochures etc.
- Check out your prospective clients via social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter etc. Furthermore in the interconnected world where six degrees of separation is increasingly a reality, find people who know them.
- Also it’s worth getting to know their PA or the junior members of their team as they will often give you additional insights.

Connecting to their hidden agenda

Having worked out what their hidden agenda is, now one needs to dig into yourself to find your point of connection with them. This can be done through three key levers: Your Core, your Credo, or your Ambition.

Your Core

Your core is your essence - the part that makes you special and different from others. It’s often about finding a shared value - one that helps you connect with them (as you both care about the same thing). What is key is to be authentic - to let the ‘real you’ be seen. Then one gains a deeper, more trusted level of connecting than if you are just on ‘transmit’ mode.

Techniques for getting to know your core:
1) Talk to people who ‘really know you’ (your ‘fan club’). They will be frank and tell you what your real strengths (and weaknesses) are.
2) Core questions to ask yourself - e.g. I am unique because.... People know me to be.... I am good at....What makes me special is...
3) Core word sort - From a list of attributes and behaviours, choose the 6 words you (/your organization) are closest to. One such list might include the following descriptors: Smart,
Creative, Transparent, Diverse, Irreverent, Secure, Entrepreneurial, Goal oriented, Elegant, Pioneer, Risk Taker, Realist, Challenger, Activist, Explorer, Initiator, Fixer, Connector, Architect

4) Projective techniques - e.g. lay out a set of photos (or leaf through magazines) and choose a few that most captures the spirit/DNA of you (/the organisation and maybe its rivals). For example for the Mastercard pitch, people chose for AmEx a business man boarding a lear Jet yet for Mastercard it was a suburban house. This led to the insight that Mastercard was for the everyday small purchases.

5) Another projective technique is to look at celebrities- choose the persons who best represents you/your organisation/the brand (and why)

6) Develop the footprint - From these inputs then develop this into a summary called the footprint. The footprint is made of two elements:
   - What the brand means
   - What the brand is

   For example, Mastercard: What the brand means: everything counts; real life and the best way to pay. Mastercard therefore is: purposeful, genuine and resourceful.

7) Profiling - i.e. the ability to define a person into a segment (e.g. using a the metaphor of a Broadway show - Some people are Script people (facts, logic, proof, and process); others are Stage people (action focused - want brevity and directness - and are not afraid of debate); some are Cast people (i.e. amiable types - sensitive and good at building relationships) and finally there are Marquee people (expressive, energetic, creative and ideas driven).

Your Credo
Understanding and expressing your credo is an important step in helping to build motivation, credibility and connection. Increasingly a company is judged less by what it sells and more by what it believes. This belief drives the trust and authenticity of an organization. When a client buys into an agency, they are buying into their beliefs and values (as these ultimately drive the behaviour and the way they do things). The people on the agency team must care about what their client care about.

How to discover and write your credo:
1) Credo questionnaire - e.g ask yourselves questions such as What’s important to me about the way I chose to live my life (and who I choose to work for)? Once you have defined the core values, then test them: Would I want to continue to stand for this value in a hundred years time? Would I still value this even if it cost me money? How do they guide my behaviour?, If I was to start a new business would I build it around these values?

2) Word sort - Choose from a list of values the ones that feel closest to you/your organisation. Start with ten then whittle them down to the top three. The list could include optimistic, relentless, selfless, demanding, exacting, compassionate, curious, trustworthy, driven, persistent, eccentric, honest, pure, driven, elegant, wise. Also ask your ‘fan club’ what they see your values to be.

3) Projective techniques - again, use the pictures/magazines/celebrity search to help identify your values/credo

4) Writing it - Start to write it with the words, “I believe.....”
Your real ambition
Real ambition is also about expressing a shared goal. It provides a galvanizing focus of all activities of a team as its a higher ideal. For example on South African Airlines the pitch was about an ambition for a nation, not just for the Airline.

There are five qualities of ambition:
1) It has noble intentions - i.e. it’s about having a positive impact on society not just the good of the organization.
2) It is a statement of clear intent - Ambition has an absolute certainty about it - it will be done.
3) It seems impossible - it has to be ambitious - It should make you feel nervous (otherwise there is no growth)! People want to be a part of making a real significant difference.
4) It has a catalytic core - real ambition has an emotional core that motivates.
5) It’s expressed in simple human language - so everyone can ‘get it’.

To help define your own personal ambition, answer these questions:
- What was I put on earth to do?
- What is the best job you could ever do?
- If you had every resource at your disposal, what would you set out to do?
- What would you want people to say about you?
- How would others benefit from your special abilities?

The phrasing of your ambition statement has two elements:
1) The transformational element - i.e. to do what?
2) The noble intent - i.e. the reason why it’s important to do it - its purpose/higher benefit of the transformational element.

For example - HerdBuoys McCann will be a role model of unity and excellence for the new South Africa, and represents what our country can become.

Your win strategy
Your core, credo and real ambition are leverage-able assets. These are the key factors that allow you to connect with your potential clients and their hidden agenda (by finding the points of commonality).

A key issue for any pitch is distillation. M&C Saatchi use the principle of brutal simplicity of thought. It’s made up of two elements: A Simple, Universally Relevant Truth (SURT) and a Brand Truth.

The author has developed his own model called the Allen Key. It has 6 elements that contribute to the win strategy. The win strategy is the connection of one of your leverage-able assets to their hidden agenda. Your real ambition connects to their wants. Your credo connects to their values and your core connects to their needs.
Example: Mastercard (Needs <-> Core) - Connect McCann’s cultural orientation towards winning and its inherent self confidence with the hidden agenda of Mastercard’s desire to best Visa in the market place once and for all.

Example: Marriott International (Values <-> Credo) - Connecting Marriott’s abiding belief in the nobility of service with McCann’s culture of client centricity and its intimate understanding and expression of Marriott’s own credo.

Example: South African Airways (Wants <-> Real ambition) - Connect HerdBuoy McCanns genuine reflection of South African unity and aspiration with the hidden agenda and the pressure decision makers at the airline felt to reflect the new South Africa successfully.

The Advocate’s advice
Whilst meeting the hidden agenda is key, one still needs to deliver a presentation that has a ruthless, ironclad argument. One should treat the pitch like a barrister in court, developing a clear case that cannot be argued against. This requires the application of clarity and singularity of argument. This compelling clarity helps cut-through and be remembered. This brutal single-minded focus can often make the difference.

Learnings from barristers show there are usually two parts to an argument:
1) Structure - ie the carefully constructed logic of the argument that is often recorded on paper.
2) Theorem - this is the narrative - the part that engages the emotional side of the brain.
   The theorem is driven by the hidden agenda. It needs to demonstrate how your team not only ‘get it’ but can also deliver your client’s hidden agenda.

One the key platforms for building a logic is called positive syllogism. In it one sets up an overarching premise that people buy into. Then one argues that in this instance this is like that, so therefore by logic this follows the same rules. It goes like this:

\[
\text{All S is P} \\
\text{This case is S} \\
\text{Therefore this case is P}
\]
**The power of storytelling**

Storytelling is the oldest and most motivating form of communication, and therefore plays a key part in helping to convince people though the melding of logic and emotion (facts do not move people). Stories are often built around timeless themes of humanity e.g. desire and human endeavor (and in so doing imparts wisdom and eternal truths).

Stories tend to have the following parts/sections (Think of Wizard of Oz or Star Wars):
- The characters: **Hero, Villain, Foils** (i.e. supporters to the hero), and **Sage**.
- The journey: **The Quest; Reversal of fortune; Turning point** and **Denouement** (i.e the summation of the story where the moral is revealed).

In reality the digital age has made storytelling even more relevant as we now live in global communities where we chose to opt in and hence persuasion is not the way to connect with them. Instead we need to use storytelling to reach into their hearts and connect with their desires.

Likewise we are seeing story being deeply embedded into products such as games. Angry birds (downloaded over 300m times) is the classic story of good over evil

How to tell a story - Identify the essential elements of your story:
- Who are the heroes?
- What opposing forces/villains do you face?
- What will you draw on (clue: your core)
- What is your quest? (clue: your real ambition)
- What values and beliefs help you overcome obstacles on your journey? (clue: your credo)
- What is at stake? What is the desire? (clue: the hidden agenda)
- How will the story be resolved
CRITICISM

The hidden agenda is an easy to read and practical book, providing simple guides to the key principles he raises in the book.

This book is half biography, half new business tutorial. One could argue that the biography part is irrelevant but I think it’s all part of who the author is (not that I have ever met him). His humanity and vulnerability comes out in the candid stories he tells of his life and this is his authentic way of gaining a deeper connection with people. Whilst I believe we should not copy him (to quote his good friend, “Just do things in your own special way”) we would all benefit from being as authentic as possible.

When I first read this I was a bit skeptical - the text was overly syrupy and full of name drops and ‘apple pie and motherhood’ type anecdotes (maybe because I am a Brit!?). Also since I have also been involved in many pitches and felt I knew how to do it. However, when I summarised it (which in effect meant re-reading it), I realised its simplicity actually covered a depth of truth. If you take the time to really understand a person’s deepest hopes and desires (and can show that we can meet them) then of course they will want to buy from you!

A few specific comments:
Is there always a hidden agenda? In my experience sometimes the agenda is out in the open.

I think there are often more than one hidden agendas! Thus the issue becomes which one is the one to lead with? The book does not explain where to focus.

Furthermore, the book does not really explain how to address the hidden agenda - it’s often hidden for a reason and to become too overt maybe misplaced. So does one just ‘hint’ at it?

I struggle with the concept of finding a deep connection every-time with their hidden agenda and the organisation/teams credo etc. I wonder how one maintains the authenticity?
How can one-day you be pitching with heartfelt connection about one brands hidden agenda (and how it connects with your core/credo/ambition) and the next week be doing the same thing with a completely different brand? Maybe that is why advertising has a poor reputation - we fake authenticity!?

I find it difficult to make his three part model (subject, emotional trigger and referent) work for all his examples.

Honestly, with hand on heart, I cannot say this is the best pitch book I have read. That said, its core idea (and the book really does have only one core idea) is a very powerful one. So for that alone....

Paul Arnold Consulting
PLANNING · FACILITATION · TRAINING
07768 775988 paul_arnold@me.com
Some of the courses run by Paul Arnold:

1. Authentic Leadership/Emotional Intelligence – The secret to success
2. Leading the creative process
3. Techniques & mindsets to open up creative thinking
4. The power & influence of storytelling in business
5. How to handle difficult conversations and feedback
6. Negotiation skills for a bigger ‘Win-Win’ in daily life

For more information:

Paul Arnold Consulting
PLANNING · FACILITATION · TRAINING
07768 775988 paul_arnold@me.com