

Transcript: Marketing Smarts Podcast, Episode 1—Lou Imbriano on Teamwork, Positions of Power, and the Goal of Your Business.

Matthew: Welcome to Marketing Smarts, a podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I'm your host Matthew Grant, Managing Editor here at MarketingProfs. Thank you for listening.

If nothing else, the recent labor disputes in the world of professional sports have highlighted one thing, sports are big business. What you might overlook, however, is the role that marketing plays in making that business as big as it is. Aside from ticket sales, sports teams and their host stadiums enjoy myriad and frequently untapped revenue opportunities.

However, it takes a lot of innovative thinking and plain old hard work to turn those opportunities into reality. No one understands this better than our guest today, Lou Imbriano, a man with sports marketing in his DNA. Current President and CEO of Trinity One, a marketing agency specializing in sports, Lou was formerly Vice President and CMO of the New England Patriots and Gillette Stadium and also served for a time as COO of the New England Revolution.

He, along with coauthor Elizabeth King, has just recently published a book entitled *Winning the Customer*, which shows how to achieve business success by building strong relationships. We've invited him here today to discuss the book, marketing, and his concept of "relationship architecture." Welcome to Marketing Smarts, Lou.

Lou: Thanks very much.

Matthew: Where are we talking to you from today, where are you based?

Lou: I'm in Boston right now. I'm actually just set up in a conference room at Hill Holiday, the advertising agency.

Matthew: I know them.

Lou: They were kind enough to let me, because it was tight, use one of their conference rooms.

Matthew: Nice. Well, thanks for joining us today. I thought we would just start out talking about the book and then kind of get into the grist of it. Who is this book for, who should be reading it and why?

Lou: I think it's for any CEO or any C-level executive in any company, small or large. But, to be right down to the nitty gritty, if you're a small business owner this book is perfect for you. There's a lot of folks who need to get an edge, who want to change how they operate,

change how they market to their consumers, and they don't have the big budgets to hire these big executives or hire these consultants. *Winning the Customer* is not going to get you 100% of the way there, but it lays out some principles that could help any small business get to the next level.

Matthew: So what are these principles in a nutshell? I'm sure you have some kind of headline versions of them.

Lou: I come from the sports background, as you said, and sports is in my DNA. What we realized is that the things we were doing at the Patriots and at the Revolution and at Trinity One were a lot of the same great principles that apply to any organization whether you're in sports or not.

For example, everybody has season ticket holders, you just don't look at them that way. So if you're a restaurateur your regular customers are your season ticket holders. Now you know who they are, the question is how do you get to know them even better, how do you know their likes and dislikes, how do you grow them in a place where you can start really getting them to spend more money with you?

So we talk about that in the book on how you view your customers, how you turn your customers into fans in order to get them to spend more with your organization.

Matthew: So is it really just aimed at sort of the retail customer? One of the things that was interesting to me about your work with the Patriots is that an organization like the Patriots or Gillette Stadium, on one hand they have a retail side to them, you're trying to get a lot of people in the seats and you're trying to get them to go to the concession stands and all these other things, but then there's also like a business-to-business side of it, you're also selling to huge corporations trying to get them to name gateways and things like that.

So when you're talking about customers is this really focused on the kind of retail person-to-person customer or are you also talking about how to sell organization-to-organization?

Lou: We really cover both areas. We talk specifically about how to bring in from a B-to-C perspective and then we go into great depth about how you form great relationships business-to-business. So we try to cover both areas, because you're dead on, at the Patriots you have fans and season ticket holders and that type of consumer, but you also have some great business-to-business sponsorship opportunities. So we looked at every angle when it came to communicating and building relationships with your clients or customers.

Matthew: I was wondering, even as we're thinking about this, I've tended to always think of B-to-B as very relationship oriented. In fact, less so a lot of times, especially if you're selling

consumer products, the relationship a lot of times is between that person, the consumer, and your product on the shelf.

Do you think that's a useful way to think about things, is B-to-B more relationship and kind of B-to-C tend to be more transactional? Do you guys talk about it in some way that could kind of transcend those categories?

Lou: Well, I'm a big believer that everything is all about relationship, whether it's someone buying a bottle of Diet Pepsi or someone buying your services as a big B-to-B deal. If you approach it as transactional then the customer can come and go. But, if you approach it as a relationship building model then the customer will be with you at all times.

What is marketing? Marketing is nothing other than building relationships with people in order for them to buy your products and services. How you build a relationship and how you go about it, now that's really the art and the talent.

At the Patriots we were an organization that in order to recognize revenue we sold signs and media and tickets and all these other things. But, these assets were just a mechanism to generate revenue. The real business we were in was to help our partners do business, or help our consumers achieve their goals.

That's how everybody really should look at marketing and building their consumer base or client base. It's not about what you're selling, it's not about the product; it's about how can you help the other people do business or achieve their goals.

Matthew: Right. And speaking of goals, because that was one thing I was reading on your blog there at LouImbriano.com, you were talking about ideas and you were saying something I've heard before, and I've even seen it definitely play out in business: it's not about the idea, it's about the execution.

But, one of the things that you said that I thought was really interesting was that it's not about the idea per se. You said a lot of people come to you and they have a great idea for your business, and people do that all the time, "I know what you should do, you should do..." Of course, that's always a little irritating, partly because the idea doesn't necessarily fit into what you're trying to do.

So what you said, if I was reading you correctly, you said that it's not about the idea so much as, "Does the idea fit into the goals, the objectives that you're trying to achieve?" And then, certainly, "Can you execute on it?" Which made me start to think more about goals and that that's the key thing for business is actually to understand their goal.

My assumption is that you don't believe that the goal is that, "We want to hit half a million dollars in revenue," or something like that or, "We want to hit \$500,000,000 in revenue." That's not a goal per say. But, I could be wrong. So I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what is a good way for people to think about the goal of their company so they can then actually figure out what ideas are really going to be the most helpful when they come to try to actually make it happen.

Lou: Yes. Revenue in general is a byproduct or a result of your obtaining your goals. But, in order to be an organization that has steady growth and is successful you really have to understand the different elements of what it's going to take for you to get to the next level.

So if you're a company – if you're a financial institution and you want to attract new customers and you want current customers to spend more money, those are two particular different goals. So one you have your current customers and you need them to spend more money and you have new business or new customers you want to bring into the fold and get them to start spending a little money.

So now you have two pretty vague but specific areas. You've got to take each one of those and then address them. Now that I know I want to get my current customers to spend more, what are the steps I'm going to take in order to make sure that they do that?

That's what it's all about. It's not about more money overall; if you do your job that will come. It is absolutely about knowing the direction you need to go in and then once your plan is in place, executing on all those levels to get to that place.

Matthew: And the execution part seems to be really critical and one of the other things that was intriguing me about your background was this connection between being in marketing and being a sort of marketing guy, but also being an operations person. You also talk a lot about really if execution is the key thing then putting together the right team is also what's going to be critical to you achieving your marketing goals.

So what can you tell us about putting together the right team and how someone goes about doing that in the best way?

Lou: Well, operations is purely the foundation for your marketing and achieving great business. So if you don't have the right structure set up, protocols, then you might as well forget about going into the business. No one person can do it all, so you have to get and put together a team of people that complement you in what you need to do and complement each other.

Everybody has this misperception or this misunderstanding that teamwork is all about everybody helping everybody else out. That's not what teamwork is. Teamwork is about knowing your role, executing your role to the fullest, making sure that you take your role to the next level and that's it. It's not doing someone else's job when they're falling down or picking up the slack for other people. That's admirable and it's a nice thing to do, but your first goal in everything you need to do is to make sure you get your job done.

Matthew: So are there any recommendations that you make for people so that they can understand that they've actually even put the structure in place – what do I want to say – that they understand the roles that they actually need before they start hiring? So do you have any advice or any method for approaching the task at hand and figuring out exactly what the team needs to look like so you can accomplish what you're trying to get done?

Lou: Everything is inverted when it comes to business. There's people and place, and then they create a plan to achieve goals. What really needs to happen as a company is you need to know what your goals are and you need to create a plan in order to get to those goals. Then you should be putting the people in positions to make that happen.

So once you know what has to be executed you want to select the right person with the right abilities for those particular job descriptions. It's not a cookie cutter world and it's not like you take this little widget and move it over here. When it comes to business you want to have the people who have the right skill set to accomplish their particular and specific jobs.

Half the time you take Charlie over at legal, "Oh, he's a good guy, let's move him over to this place." Or so-and-so over in accounting, "They'd be great over in operations." Well, maybe not. So knowing what the job is, is much more important than having the people first.

Matthew: I'm wondering do you just go by gut or do you have some formal way of sketching things out? Or is it really just we're going to have email campaigns so I need an email person or we need to have signage so I need the signage person? Like when you were putting together your team at the Patriots, were there any particular challenges you had or did you have a hard time finding people to fill specific roles?

Lou: Well, the first thing to realize is your staff should always be fluid and evolving. You never say, "This guy is the guy, he's in there." You constantly want to be challenging people to rise to the occasion to see what they're made out of. Yes, there's a base level where you bring people in.

Like at the Patriots you need someone to produce in-game entertainment, so you want to hire somebody with some production experience and some writing experience. That will kick things

off for you, but that person also needs to have the right attitude, the right dedication, the ability to understand what everybody else is doing in the organization.

If the group isn't talking to each other and paying attention to everything else all the other folks are doing, you're not going to maximize all the different things you can do. So the guy, believe it or not, who is running in-game entertainment, he really needs to know what the sales people are bringing in for new sponsors, he needs to know what the fans like when they're buying product, he needs to know what their music likes are.

So you really have to delve deeper to be the best of your specific position. Sometimes it's hit or miss, Matt. You think you have the right person and they don't fit. But, if you look at it as, "I'm hiring this guy and that's the end all be all," that's a mistake. You have to look at it as an ongoing evolution.

Matthew: Right. Also, it sounds like that was even how your own career evolved. You would get hired for one thing and then it would lead to something else.

Lou: Yes, definitely.

Matthew: I was wondering then was there anything that you did, like you said sometimes you think you've got the right person, but you didn't. Obviously you can look at their resume, you can ask them about things they did at their job, but what are the things that you do to kind of assess, "Does this person really have the right attitude? Do they have the attention to detail?" Was it all about whether they had hairs growing out of their nose and that kind of stuff?

Lou: No, but that makes me crazy when there's hair growing out of people's noses. Again, I would look at everybody's individual performance. Everybody should have a checklist of what needs to be done.

First and foremost, this is the easy part, are they at least accomplishing everything on their checklist? If they are, okay, the next level. To what level are they achieving it? Is it bare basics where they just run around and they're task masters and they just want to check off their list because they want to finish it or are they over-delivering on each one of these different pieces, these items that need to be done on the to-do list?

Then if they are over achieving, how is it impacting other parts of the organization? Is it negative? Because sometimes some folks, because they're myopic, and they're trying to accomplish what they need to accomplish, they're doing it at the detriment of other departments. So is it detrimental or is it enhancing other areas?

Again, everything is interconnected in an organization. The biggest mistake most companies make is they do not have what I like to call a “VP of Synergy” — somebody who gets the whole big picture of all the organizations. Some people say that the CEO is supposed to be that person. Well that’s not reality.

The CEO is the person who sees the 40,000 foot level. You need someone on the ground level who gets that Joe in operations is having issues with this and the guy from marketing is having problems getting his signs up at the right time. So someone who can kind of connect the dots for an organization is one of the most valuable positions in any organization. Yet, I don’t think 10% of companies in the United States have that position.

Matthew: Right. They probably have someone in the organization who is like that, but they probably haven’t formalized it or even thought about it. It makes me realize that when you’re talking about relationships, and of course I was immediately thinking about building relationships with the customer, building a relationship with your buyer and all these things, but it sounds like what you’re saying is that relationships within the organization are just as key.

And having strong relationships within the organization, as well as having a good “relationship detector,” in a sense, so that you actually know what kind of relationships exist in the organization and how well or how poorly they’re functioning.

Lou: Yes. That’s why I’m a big believer of knowing—and I’ve made a habit of this since the beginning of my career, even before I left college—is understanding every job function within an organization., because the more I knew about the job function the more I could contribute to the organization and help people out.

By the way, that just makes our group and what I do better. It reminds me of a funny story. When I was at the Patriots in the early days we had this little adversarial relationship with operations because we were trying to accomplish all these new things very quickly and they were so used to standard operating procedures. We were trying to break them out of that mold and it took some time; it wasn’t easy. It actually took, over the course of time, getting rid of some people who wouldn’t break out of that mold.

But, there was a time where I jumped on a forklift, because I wasn’t getting the assistance we needed as a group, and I started moving things around, boxes here and boxes there and everybody looked at me, I was the VP of Marketing, they were like, “What is he doing driving a forklift?”

Well, fortunately, when I was in college I loaded trucks and drove a forklift. So they saw me doing that and they were like, “Oh my god, if he can do that and if he doesn’t mind rolling up

his sleeves, we better get our act together.” It really helped motivate operations and had them look at things differently.

Matthew: It sounds like behind what you’re talking about for business there’s also some important sort of leadership lessons that you’ve picked up along the way. It sounds like you’re the kind of person who helps motivate and inspire people and kind of help maintain this esprit de corps. So getting in there, getting up on the forklift and moving boxes around definitely sends a really clear message to people. What are other things that you’ve done as a leader, do you think, that you have found, or you found out later even, were particular inspiring to people working for you?

Lou: I think, and I’ve done it a lot, anytime I’ve rolled up my sleeves and actually got dirty, people appreciate that and they respect that. But, I think the biggest thing that I was always great at, and I think still, is that I would go to bat for my people to any degree. If someone did something wrong I was always there to help them or protect them. You know, they would get it from me, but they would never get it from ownership or anybody else.

I haven’t hit it perfectly every single time and over the course of time you learn from your mistakes. I might have been too tough on some people, at times; I might have been too easy on people at times. But, I think if you have people who care and who are dedicated and want to do good things for the company, you need as a leader to protect them from all outside issues or problems.

Matthew: Right. It also sounds like you need to have the sort of gumption to ask people to move along when they’re just not the right fit for the company or they don’t have that sort of drive to make it a success.

Lou: If people don’t fit with the organization you have to definitely cut them loose. It’s not an easy thing. In football, if there’s a player who isn’t up to par and is not making the catches or not getting their assignments right, they cut them right away. In the business world people are more hesitant to do that because it’s not part of the culture, but you really have to cut bad people.

It’s for their good as well as the company’s good, because if they’re not achieving and doing great things they’re not going to be in the place they want to be and they’re going to be probably an issue for the organization, one of those problem childs. So you’re much better off cutting them loose, letting them get another job, and then finding someone who fits better with your organization.

Matthew: And as you said, if relationships are key and relationships between people on the team are key, then if you have someone who is a bad egg or problem child then it brings down the whole set up.

I'm thinking about that and I'm wondering too, a lot of times one of the things we talk about at MarketingProfs is this relationship between marketing and sales. There can be a lot of tension between marketing and sales and a lot of times in organizations the relationships aren't clear and responsibilities aren't evenly divided, things like that.

So I was wondering if you have any recommendations – well, first of all, if you have ideas what the differences are between marketing and sales, but then any ideas about how to make sure the marketing team and the sales team are actually working together to accomplish this sort of shared goal of the organization.

Lou: I definitely have very definitive ideas on this and I'm passionate about it. I don't think marketing and sales are two separate departments in an organization, I think they're one and they have to be led by one person. I do believe that person should lean towards the marketing side as opposed to the sales side, but have sales knowledge as well.

If you have a leader, I like to call the person a Chief Marketing Officer, that Chief Marketing Officer should have marketing and sales underneath them. And because it's one organization there will still be – the sales folks want to get money and bring money in, the marketing people want to keep the integrity of the brand and the relationship. But, there will always be some sort of battle.

However, if they're in the same group and there's one judge who makes the decision based on what's best for the organization then there will be less fighting amongst each other and more, "Okay, I heard your side. I heard your side. Here's why we're going to lean towards the sales side, because of XY and Z and it makes more sense for the overall good of the corporation."

I think when you have them together like that it solves a lot of the problems in itself.

Matthew: Right. So it's not just marketing is throwing stuff over the wall to sales and sales is either complaining "I'm not getting what I want from marketing," or marketing is like, "Sales isn't really delivering what I need." So organizations, where they have these split up functions, they kind of build a dysfunction into their organization, it sounds like that's what you're saying.

Lou: They really do. And here's why they're different. The skill sets from a pure marketing person and the skill sets from a pure sales person are very different. Most of the marketing people are more ideas and building, and not as aggressive. You know the types; you

can see them. The sales people are more about closing business and getting money in the door. They're much more aggressive and they push the limits.

So the two together, neither one are right. The two together, if they work harmoniously together, are the best way to do it because the marketing people sometimes are more detailed, more planning, more ahead of the game, and the sales people know how to push, push, push. So that's why I like the two together.

Matthew: Right. That comes back to what you were saying: teamwork isn't everyone doing the same job or helping each other, everyone is doing their own thing and having a clear sense of what that one thing is they have to do, and then really hitting it.

Lou: Yes. What makes me crazy, Matt, is when someone from sales or marketing, whatever way, someone from sales says, "Oh, she should be doing this, this, and this." Well, if you're so good at marketing, what are you doing in the sales department?" Or let's talk to her, get together, break it down, how can you help out.

So I think it's communicating and being on the same page and making sure everybody is in agreement. There's going to be some levels where you don't get full buy-in or total buy-in, but you want to break down the barriers to get as much buy-in as possible on certain initiatives.

Matthew: Right. A key message of yours, of course, is that it's about relationships, selling is about relationships, organizational development is about relationships, marketing is about building relationships and strengthening relationships and making it personal.

I'm wondering in your professional life who is the best relationship builder that you've come across?

Lou: There's a few. It's funny, I'm in Hill Holiday today and the guy who built this company, Jack Connors, is probably one of the best relationship guys ever. Just a solid guy. I tell a story in the book where I met him when I was 22 years old and I hadn't seen him in 10 years and not only did he remember me, he knew that I had moved out of radio and went to the Patriots. He was just amazing on how much he knew about me. He's just a great relationship architect.

Another guy on the West Coast right now, in San Francisco, is a gentleman by the name of Mike Lynch. I say West Coast because he's not the Mike Lynch on Channel 5 here in Boston, but Mike is a great guy, too. Mike Lynch from Visa. He's the Head of Global Sponsorship for Visa and this guy is just amazing. He knows how to build relationships; he knows how to give people what they want and make them happy. I'm sure he can pick up the phone for just about anything he wants and in one phone call get it done.

That is right there the key, people want to know why, why do you need to build relationships, why you need to have relationships or a network for success? It's because if you can pick up the phone and call one person and get what you've done accomplished, how much easier is your life, how less time does it take, and how much more can you get done? That's the key.

That's why experience is so great, because it takes you a shorter period of time to get things done. I always tell people I get things done, and I've been in business for 25 years, I get things done in an afternoon that it might take some people a month to get done. Not because I'm smarter, not because I'm better, but because I know who to call and I know what to ask for.

Matthew: That's what you talk about too, is being in a position of power. And the way you talk about it, it's not being CEO or king of the world or something like that, but it goes back to this real sense of when you go to the power company; it's not because they run everything, but they make it possible for you to do everything.

So a real position of power is someone who has the power, like you're saying, to get things done and get them done quickly. So really, if you want to be in a position of power, as many people sort of imagine they do, then it's about building these relationships and building this network for success, the way you talk about it.

Lou: You want to be a go-to-guy or go-to-woman. You want people to think of you first, in whatever category comes up. When I was at the Patriots I was head of marketing, but I'd get calls early on from ownership. They'd say they need a reservation at this particular place and their assistant couldn't get one and I'd go, "Okay, I'll take care of it." I got it done for them.

You want to be the person that when it can't get done they go to you. If that's who you are, no matter what your title is, you'll have a job anywhere, you'll be in that position of power and you'll be able to show value to the people who hire you.

Matthew: We're getting to the end of our time here. If people want to find out more about you or your company or your book, where should they go?

Lou: Loulmbriano.com is easy, although my name's not the easiest name to spell, but if you go to **Loulmbriano.com** you basically can get to anywhere, my blog and my company Trinity One. We also have **Trinity1.com** to talk a little bit about what we do. *Winning the Customer*, I hope everybody goes out and takes a peek at it. If you like my blog, you'll love the book, I'll just say that.

Matthew: Fair enough. Lou, thank you so much again for joining us here on Marketing Smarts. Listener, thank you very much for listening. Join us again next week when we will be talking about agile marketing with Frank Days, the agile marketer himself. Once again, this has

been the Marketing Smarts podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I'm your host Matthew Grant, now signing off.