

**Matthew:** Hello and welcome to Marketing Smarts, a podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I'm your host Matthew Grant, Managing Editor here at MarketingProfs, and I thank you for listening.

Marketers are in the business of persuasion. We persuade people to take an interest in our products and services, to try them out, to consider purchasing them and even to decide to buy them.

We do most of the above online, in print and in person with words. Yet, ask a marketer if he or she has ever studied rhetoric, the ancient science of persuasive speech, and you will get a nervous laugh or a blank stare, or maybe even a black eye.

Marketers are not alone in this. Rhetoric has been gradually pushed out of basic education over the last century. Even I, with a humanities PhD never formally studied rhetoric.

One man who has made it his mission to reacquaint the general public and the professional world with the power of rhetoric is Jay Heinrichs. Jay began his crusade in 2007 with the book *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us about the Art of Persuasion*. He has continued the campaign most recently with *Word Hero: A Fiendishly Clever Guide to Crafting the Lines That Get Laughs, Go Viral and Live Forever*.

We invited Jay to Marketing Smarts to find out more about rhetoric, how we can use it to become more persuasive and how a knowledge of rhetorical devices can make us more aware of the persuasive moves made by others.

Jay, welcome to Marketing Smarts.

**Jay:** Thanks, Matt.

**Matthew:** In your book from several years ago *Thank You For Arguing* and your more recent book *Word Hero* you are actively trying to acquaint a popular audience with the art and science of rhetoric. Given that our audience consists of marketers, why do you believe that marketers should familiarize themselves with the teachings of Cicero and the other ancients?

**Jay:** Marketers tend to be my best audiences in part because they understand what rhetoric is all about. It's not about words sitting around and looking pretty. It's not about self-expression which is taught far too much in schools.

It's about words that actually get up and make a living for themselves. These are words that do something and have a particular purpose. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion but it's more than that. It's understanding language and how it affects people's views of reality, gets them to do things and changes their behavior. That's what marketing is about.

**Matthew:** That brings up one of the main stereotypes people have of marketing. It's something that they don't like about marketing. People view marketing, advertising more accurately, as manipulation. Are you saying that marketers should learn about rhetoric so they become better at manipulating people?

**Jay:** Yes.

**Matthew:** Good answer.

**Jay:** I can get geeky on you and quote a Greek rhetoric philosopher named Isocrates, not Socrates. He said that without manipulation humans would never do anything in common. You have to persuade people in order to get them excited about a common goal. Otherwise you can't do anything in common.

We manipulate tools. That's what rhetoric is. It's the manipulation of tools that get people to do what you want. On the other hand, I believe that everyone should study rhetoric so that they can understand when they're being manipulated and they can inoculate themselves against the more harmful kinds of manipulation.

I've been studying rhetoric for about 30 years. I love a good advertising campaign. It still works on me. I see the tools behind them.

**Matthew:** Back in the olden days, I think about Cicero addressing the Senate in Rome. He could assume that most of the people he was talking to were familiar with what he was doing and maybe even appreciated it thinking, "That was a great move." Does it change the game when you apply rhetorical skills on an audience that is ignorant of them?

**Jay:** It really does. There was craftsmanship in what Cicero did. My son studied Latin, bless him. He could tell me how brilliant Cicero was. I have to read him in translation. In Ancient Greece and Rome and up until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in this country, rhetoric was considered the art of leadership.

It was an elite skill. If you were going to become a leader in your society in Ancient Rome or in 18<sup>th</sup> century America, you would learn rhetoric as the skills of leadership. Look at what the founders said in their papers.

Alexander Hamilton said he thought that Congress could work because the disagreements between classes of people, they weren't thinking Democrats and Republicans, would be arbitrated by an impartial group of educated people.

By that he meant rhetoricians. These were people who were trained in the skills of rhetoric as John Adams and every founder was. Even Benjamin Franklin studied rhetoric in grammar school. They would be able to arbitrate between disagreeing parties.

They founded the constitution on it. The understanding was that there would be these checks and balances. There would be a group to grease the wheels. They would be the people who would act as referees in society. They were the most educated people, the people who studied rhetoric.

**Matthew:** You pointed out in your writing that the science of rhetoric itself evolved over the ages. People came to mock it as a discipline that proliferates labels about different ways of speechifying. I was wondering if you could boil it down assuming that most of our listeners have never taken a class in rhetoric.

Some of them may have. Even I, as I sit here with my PhD, have never formerly studied rhetoric. I could go through our entire educational system until the end and only accidentally on the street pick up what I know about rhetoric. I may have been using it unconsciously is more like it.

When you're explaining what rhetoric is, how do you introduce it particularly to a business audience? How do you talk about it? How do you let people know exactly what rhetoric is?

**Jay:** Rhetoric has three basic tools. They are logic, emotion and what Aristotle called "character." Logic is not the logic that we have learned, spotting fallacies and working in formulaic language. It's using the beliefs and expectations of your audience to your persuasive advantage.

Then there is emotion which can change the mood of a person. That may be your only goal in persuasion, to get someone who is angry no longer angry, for example. Emotion can also be used to get someone to desire a particular goal. That is very important in marketing.

Then there is character. Aristotle, the guy who invented logic as we know it, said this was the more powerful tool. Character is the projection of the speaker's or persuader's image. This is where things get interesting when I teach marketers.

We look very closely at the tools of character which is whether the audience likes and trusts you or the company you represent. How do you get someone to like and trust you? If you can do that then people are much more likely to follow what you say.

For example, when Apple introduces a new version of the iPhone people buy it without knowing if it works. Of course it will. It's Apple. Liking and trusting, at least trusting, Steve Jobs to come up with the right kind of product was what made the Apple brand. You don't get more character than that, as they say in rhetoric.

To gain the tool of character there are tools that you can apply to get people to like and trust you. That's what I teach to audiences. Not all of them have to do with fancy and clever language. What I call "wit craft" can get people to think you're a smart person and remember you for saying something memorable. That's what a lot of my book *Word Hero* is about.

There are also tools that you can use to get people to change their views of reality and what the world is like. Those are the most powerful manipulative tools of all. Most people can't spot them. That is rhetoric in a nutshell. You didn't study rhetoric formally. Neither did I. I had to stumble on it by accident. I found a book in a college library that led me to all of this.

**Matthew:** Now I want to know what the tips and tricks are for getting people to like and trust me. Can you give us some insight into when Aristotle was talking about character or the folks who came after Aristotle? What are the sorts of moves, rhetorically speaking, that people can employ to build the trust side of the equation?

**Jay:** The Greeks were big on threes. Just as there are three basic tools of rhetoric, logic, emotion and character, there are three ways to get an audience to trust you. The first is what Aristotle called "practical wisdom."

You have the book learning but you also know how to apply it to specific occasions. A good example of this would be a heart surgeon. You trust that the heart surgeon is very highly trained both in the intellectual discipline of medicine but also with enough practice.

You may have a highly educated surgeon just out of medical school. You might prefer the more experienced surgeon who has performed that surgery 200 times. That's practical wisdom.

The second big way to get an audience to trust you is to believe that you have their best interests at heart. That's what Aristotle called "disinterest." These days we understand that so poorly in this country. Even our computers will translate "disinterest" into "uninterest" which is a very different thing.

"Disinterest" is being free of special interests. It's being able to think independently. You are not beholden to anyone. Mother Teresa is the ultimate disinterested person. She answered only to God. She cared for the people who she cared for.

The third tool is the most powerful of all. That is what Aristotle called "arete" which translates more or less into virtue. Virtue is the notion that we share each other's values and we're part of the same tribe.

This is what we focus on the most when I talk to marketers. You are one of us. That is a very important tool in persuading someone. That is something that politicians work very hard on.

Corporations should work a great deal harder on it. It's the one that works the most in terms of marketing campaigns.

**Matthew:** In marketing people now talk about content marketing. Many of the rules recommended for content marketing follow the first two elements you were talking about there. That is demonstrating practical wisdom.

Companies try to show and share their expertise as a way of building trust with their audience. They say you're not supposed to be shilling when you write good content. You're being helpful and disinterested.

You are saying, "I just want to help you. I'm telling you these things whether you buy from me or not. I don't care. I just want to help." This is how you ingratiate yourself to people or build trust with them.

I'm interested in the virtue part. There is also a certain amount of marketing these days called "cause marketing." A company tries to show, "We have our heart in the right place." I think of Ben & Jerry's.

A certain amount of their profits will always go to the needy or to help with projects that their audience believes in and wants to support with their dollars. What are things that individuals or organizations could do to demonstrate their virtuous character?

**Jay:** You summed it up beautifully. I have to tell you a story about Ben & Jerry's. I graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont. I went back to visit a friend a few years after I graduated. She said, "There's this new ice cream place in a former gas station in Burlington, Vermont that you have to try. The ice cream is amazing."

We showed up. Here were these two scruffy-looking hippies who were really grouchy. They were serving terrific ice cream. The line took forever. The place didn't seem clean. I hope I don't get sued for saying that. It didn't seem like a very nice place.

I said to my friend, "You know what? Service is everything. The product is not enough." They weren't my type. I thought, "I don't want to come back and face these guys to have more of this great ice cream." There went my chance to invest in Ben & Jerry's for the rest of my life.

They lacked virtue in my eyes. They could have done better as far as I was concerned. They replaced their private scruffy persona with one that was more friendly and playful. It appealed to American's sense of ice cream being a playful thing. I think that was terrific virtue.

In terms of a marketing blog, how can you express your virtue? One of the best ways to do that is to form an organization. In essence, that's what you do if you have members of your blog,

subscribers who sign on. They feel as if they're a member of your club. That's an important kind of virtue marketing if you want to call it that. Magazines have been doing it for years. What kind of man reads *Playboy*? There is the *Cosmopolitan* woman.

That's what virtue is. It's being a member of a group, sharing the same values and doing what you can to live up to those values. If it means smoking a pipe and wearing your pajamas to dinner like Hugh Hefner that makes you virtuous in the eyes of the kind of man who reads *Playboy*.

One of the most important things is the give-and-take you have with your audience to make them feel as if they're valued and belong. A great virtue marketing campaign was the Old Spice guy. You had this humorous guy.

He was the kind of man you want your man to smell like, whatever that slogan was. What made that work was the idea that you could write into Old Spice guy and he may mention your comment on his video blog. That's what made that whole thing work.

In rhetorical terms that's what's considered virtuous. He made you feel as if you belonged even if you never got your comment on the air or on his video blog. You still felt as if you had a chance to do that. That sense of belonging is what virtue is all about.

Here is the opposite of that. I'm working with a client. I probably shouldn't name them. They are an advertising agency that has a campaign overseas to try to reduce the amount of binge drinking in that country.

They're employing the advertising tools that advertisers in this country have been using with public service campaigns to try to cut down on binge drinking among teenagers. Here the campaigns have been proven not only to be unsuccessful but there is some evidence that shows that those advertisements actually increase the amount of binge drinking.

They have the opposite effect. In rhetorical terms that's entirely understandable. The reason is that virtue is very closely tied to a person's self-identity. One of the most important things you need to do in marketing is not just to find what your audience desires, what they want to buy or how they want to behave but what they think of in terms of their identity.

The thing that makes it complicated is that when it comes to drinking, people are often trying to take a vacation from their identity. This is what young people do in the Ivy League. They join fraternities. They do stupid things. *Animal House* documented that beautifully.

You get people who meet very high expectations and want to escape from that now and then. Overseas you have this culture where young women will get plastered on a Saturday night. It's like a war zone. There are women sprawled on the sidewalks. It's disgusting. These young

women have very high expectations for themselves and how they should behave when they're sober.

The drinking lets them get away from that. The advertising campaign says, "Think of the consequences." There is one campaign that says, "Why let good times go bad?" The print campaign shows a young woman dancing happily. In the next frame she's in the bathroom looking miserable over a toilet.

That will probably encourage drinking. Young women want to be bad. Being disgusting is part of being a bad girl. There are better ways to campaign. You have to appeal to the bad girl.

In the case of this country, if it's young men who are the binge drinkers, how do you let them take a vacation from themselves that doesn't involve getting drunk, getting sick, going to the hospital or worse date rape? That's something that you can't lecture. You can't talk about the consequences.

I worked at a magazine called *Outside* for a while. That magazine published *Into Thin Air* about the people who died on Mount Everest. At the time, this is still true, tourists were going up that mountain. Every time something bad happened they would die.

Jon Krakauer went up with a group and it was disastrous. A number of people died. What happened after that book came out and became a huge bestseller? The number of people trying to climb Everest multiplied.

Why is that? It's because they attached their identity, their sense of virtue and their best selves, to the idea of climbing Everest. The more dangerous and deadly it was the more their virtue stock went up if they climbed it themselves. Does that make sense?

**Matthew:** It definitely makes sense. Now my wheels are spinning. How do you fight things like binge drinking or stop people going up Everest if the way we think about binge drinking and its consequences or the dangers we associate with climbing Mount Everest are what people are after?

It reminded me of, I want to say in the Regan era, an anti-marijuana add that said, "Nothing happens when you smoke pot." It showed some guy sitting around, smoking weed, watching TV and eating Cheetos.

They were trying to drive home that nothing happens. You don't do anything. You turn into a lump on the couch. I don't think that stopped people from smoking pot. It seems as if that would be the message you would have to come up with.

You could say, “Nothing happens when you binge drink.” You can’t show the consequences. As you said, that fulfills the unconscious wish that people have for binge drinking. Is there a solution? In the case you’re talking about did they come up with different ads that were more effective? Is it a lost cause and people will just get sloppy drunk if they want to?

**Jay:** I’ll let you know a week from now. I’m working with this agency to come up with a new campaign. In my workshops I let them come up with it. I teach them the tools. Then we work together to craft something.

In the case of young women and binge drinking you have to look at the identity that they want. Look at the campaign for Vegas. “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” That gives you real insight into what might work in a binge drinking campaign for young women.

The Vegas ad is all about putting on your mask. You get to be someone else. Then you come home. You get to leave that bad boy or girl behind. In the case of binge drinking you have to show how to be subversive without being drunk.

One way to do that would be to show really out there characters like artists with lots of body piercings or cool, edgy people watching young women staggering drunk down the street and looking at them scornfully. You could do a social campaign on top of that such as, “Show your bad girl.” Maybe you could be subversive if you’re talking to a more educated audience.

We use what I call “tropes” which in rhetoric are ways of bending reality. I teach a particular kind of trope that forms a micro-image in people’s heads. They can’t get it out of their heads. You could plant a micro-image for Everest. There are many different ways to do this.

It could show someone with a lame piece of luggage trying to haul it up Everest. The slogan could be, “Everest. It’s not for tourists.” You want to take that badge of coolness away. First of all, Everest is not the hardest mountain to climb. It’s because it’s the highest.

It’s like visiting the Mona Lisa and the Louvre and missing all the other great art. You have to get your ticket stamped saying, “I saw the Mona Lisa.” It’s the same thing. If you don’t climb more difficult mountains like Chao Yu or K2 then you’re a tourist.

If you can get that across in the outdoor magazines I think you could make a difference and cut back on the number of people who climb the mountain. Their sense of virtue and manliness would be challenged if you say, “It’s not cool to climb Everest. There are better mountains to climb. “

**Matthew:** I like that. I don’t want to be that tourist lugging my Samsonite luggage up Mount Everest unless a yeti was going to bang on it. Then that would be cool. You got me

thinking about something else. I know you were talking about working with clients and running workshops.

In *Word Hero* you say, “Here’s my guide. You will be able to say things that are wittier. You will be funnier. You will be more memorable.” It made me think about creativity, wit and people who say memorable things. There is the notion that you could actually teach people to do that.

I had someone on the show, Alicia Arnold, who does a lot of creative problem solving and creativity training within an ad agency. One of the things we talked about was getting people past this idea that you couldn’t learn how to be creative.

Creativity is either something you have or you don’t. This isn’t something you can learn. You have great artists. They’re geniuses. Then you have everyone else.

It sounds like you believe that people can learn how to at least improve the way they speak and make the things they say potentially more memorable. I believe that, too. How do you teach people to be rhetorically creative or verbally inventive?

**Jay:** There are a couple of ways. First, there is a way to think that I call in my book the “pith method.” That is how to boil down and then boil down again what it is you’re trying to express or what the core of an issue is. I go through what I call “true confessions” in my workshops.

I allow people only two words. You have to boil down to the point where it’s about two words. That comes out of an experience I had when I worked at *Rodale* as an editorial director. We had a CEO who said, “True confessions. What are your magazines really about?”

We wanted to say, “Our magazines are about storytelling and empowerment.” He said, “No. What are they really about?” *Men’s Health* is really about sex and abs. It’s really about that. That helps clarify what you put on the covers. It helps to sell magazines.

Similarly, if you can boil down what you want to say in two words now you can put them back into a sentence. You can begin applying the tricks. That’s the first thing. It’s this clear thinking that gets you down to the barest minimum of what something is really about.

This is the second thing. I think it’s possible to strengthen certain aspects of the brain that have to do with wit. By “wit” I don’t just mean telling funny jokes or getting off one-liners. Wit is the sharp end of intelligence.

It’s a way of expressing things so that people will remember and appreciate. Wit is entertainment. It’s also enlightenment. How do you do that? I have 43 tools in my book. I assume that you’re not going to use all of them.

Some will appeal to you more than others depending on what you want to do. For example, you're a parent with kids around the dinner table. You can't do better than puns and their cousins among figures of speech.

They are ways of manipulating the sounds of words and homonyms in ways that make people miserable when they listen to someone who does it all the time. With kids, it strengthens parts of their brains and makes them better conversationalists when they're older.

As a proud father, my two kids are grown. They grew up hearing endless puns and being rewarded when they practiced themselves. They are witty today. They're fun companions.

**Matthew:** Here is a true confession. When I applied to college for the university that I went to we were asked on the application, "Use one word to describe yourself." As pretentious as it sounds today I used the word "witty" for exactly the reasons you were saying.

I thought it combined a sense of intelligence and thoughtfulness with a sense of humor. I don't know if I exhibited that thus far in this last half hour. I was trying to claim it back then.

**Jay:** It's truth in advertising. I think you have it.

**Matthew:** OK. We're getting towards the end of our time. What I'm most curious about are your thoughts on why rhetoric and figures of speech have fallen into such disrepute. I think you'll hear this classic political thing, "That's just rhetoric."

We dismiss entire arguments as rhetoric. We also hear, "That's just a figure of speech. That's not how things work." How did this move from being the science and art of leadership to something that people use to show that people are "full of it" or bogus?

**Jay:** I think that's a sign of ignorance. People don't know what rhetoric is all about. They think that it's nothing but empty speech. When I first discovered rhetoric it was in a college library when I was bored at my job.

I was wandering through the stacks. I came upon this really dark part of the library literally covered with cobwebs. There were books that hadn't been checked out in more than 100 years. I was curious. I pulled down this book at eye level. I think it was covered in red leather. The other books were black or dull gray.

I opened it up. It had been signed by John Quincy Adams. It actually had his real signature inside. Being a history buff I was curious as to what it was all about. It turned out to have been a set of lectures he gave at Harvard as the first Boylston professor of rhetoric and oratory.

He was teaching rhetoric while he was a U.S. Senator. He was somehow commuting between Boston and Washington, D.C. I don't know how. He was lecturing to college freshman in that

first lecture. These were kids. He told them to take from the relics of ancient oratory those un-resisted powers which mold the mind of man to the will of the speaker and yield the guidance of the nation to the dominion of the voice.

Get past the fancy Victorian language there. Can you imagine being one of those freshmen thinking, "I have to get some of those un-resisted powers. I'm going to rule the nation someday because I'm at Harvard. I will use these skills to mold the mind of man to my will as a speaker."

That kind of power was something that John Quincy Adams ended up yielding himself with mixed success. On the other hand, you have David McCullough. He wrote the book *The Greater Journey* which is a bestseller now.

He wrote about Americans who were going to go on to do great things and how they visited Paris. Somehow that made all the difference. He said in interviews that when he was researching the book he was struck by how eloquent, witty and what brilliant writers his subjects were.

Only one of them was a professional writer. Somehow people wrote so beautifully back then. This was the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The reason was that rhetoric was still taught. It was taught as a writing discipline. It started out as an oral spoken one.

People were capable of being witty back then because they learned how to do it. It took years of education and practice. It's not something you can pick up right away. It used to be considered the chief art. It was something that would earn your membership into the elite society. We don't have that now. I think that's why we scorn the art.

**Matthew:** On that note of molding minds with un-resisted powers and taking our place among the elite of society, we will end today. I did want to give you a chance to say something if people wanted to find out more about *Word Hero* or your writings on rhetoric and figures of speech. Where would you direct them?

**Jay:** I have a website called WordHero.org. That's the easy one. I have a language blog called Figaro Speech. If you go to WordHero.org you can find what I do. I have two books out. They are *Thank You for Arguing* and *Word Hero*. The first one is an introduction to this art of persuasion. The second one is about the language of what I call "wit craft" and how to be witty.

**Matthew:** When I was reading through Word Hero my mind immediately made that "witch craft." I kept seeing it that way. I thought, "That's sort of bold. I understand what he's talking about, using these magical powers of language to change reality. It is like witch craft." It was only this morning when I looked back and thought, "No, Matt. That said wit craft."

**Jay:** I love it. That worked perfectly then.

**Matthew:** Exactly. Thank you so much, Jay, for joining us on Marketing Smarts. Thank you, listener, for listening to the very end. This has been Marketing Smarts podcast brought to you by MarketingProfs. I've been your host Matthew Grant. I'll talk to you next week.