

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise



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Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

Welcome to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint, a podcast about freedom—freedom from expectations of society and the traditional path to success that has been ingrained in us from our early years, I'm joined by mavericks, renegades, and non-conformers to discuss an anti-traditional path to financial freedom, freedom of time, relationships, health, and ultimately freedom of purpose. My name is Dr. David Phelps. Let's get started.

David Phelps: Good day, everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders Mastermind community and Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. Today, I get to bring back one of my favorites and certainly should be one of your favorites, Mr. Mike Michalowicz. Mike, sir, how are you doing today?

Mike Michalowicz: I'm doing well, Dr. David. Good to be back with you, sir.

David Phelps: It's always cool. I get to preface this by saying, I have the opportunity, as you do, to meet a lot of influential people. I do a lot of interviews of people, but I actually know you. I know you're not just a great guy, because you are, not just to say a prolific writer and someone who really understands the business entrepreneur mindset, but I've been in rooms of you where I've watched you take your ideation and take the complexity of business, because look, anybody's out there on the street today, running any kind of a business, it's a complex world. It's a world with a lot of pivots and turns and there's so much we have to try to figure out how to do this stuff.

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

And what I love about your books, this is like number seven and I've got all seven, I've got all seven, I love them, is that you take the complex and you make it simple, but you also make it fun and innovative. I think you give frameworks that take the complex and allow business owners like me, to actually go put these into place. That's the key. I mean, you can recarry all day long, if you can't put in practice. The book today we're talking about, your latest book is Get Different. Mike, I have to say, in a very positive way, sir, you are different.

Mike Michalowicz: Thank you, and been proud of it.

David Phelps: Been proud of it.

Mike Michalowicz: One thing I do is I look at my contemporaries, in this case, the authors space, business authors and say, what is the common approach that business authors use to promote their books, write their books. And then I ask myself, what can I do that's different than that and it's consistent with who I am? I think to be different for different take is actually very dangerous, but to be different where it's an amplification of who you naturally are and separates you from the pack, that's a big deal. That's what I write about in this book is how to stand out, but also how to be true to yourself.

David Phelps: Let's just talk about marketing as a whole for a moment. Again, I'm thinking from my early days in business where the word marketing really meant more like advertising and I didn't have a clue. Unfortunately Mike, most business owners don't. The world of marketing is... Today, I need a website. I need to get somebody to do SEO for me. I need a Facebook page and maybe some other social media pages. I need a sign on my brick and mortar. I

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

need a logo and Hey, shouldn't that just do it. I mean, it's the fiddle dreams, build it. And they will come if I just do those basic things. We know today, the world is way more complex and people are distracted. You talk about milliseconds, which we'll get to. The millisecond effect. But let's just talk about that aspect today because the commoditization of the world, industries, businesses, product services, it's just rampant today, standing out is critical.

Mike Michalowicz: It is absolutely critical. And I think the equivalent of the websites and social media presence, that's the brochure of 30 years ago. Saying, "Hey, I have a brochure. Why isn't everyone flocking to me?" Well, you have to propagate that. A brochure is how people can dig deeper with you, but did you garner their attention? Is there a desire to work with you? Are you addressing a pain they need? Marketing is the way we present ourselves and there's so many mediums we can do it. We can do it through email and we can use social media and so forth. It's direct mail campaigns. It's billboards. It's simply the way you present yourself. I remember my first business where I simply had the trifold brochure and was shocked people weren't coming to me. I was a computer guy.

I did computer systems and computer networks. I presented myself the same, and this is the danger of replicating. I did the best practice of our industry. I presented the same as my competition. I had all the certifications. I had all the proof. I was really great in what I did. I was the best in my market, and so did my competition. They made the same argument. We had our big oversized suits. We looked like lanky, living

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

scarecrows, and we were duking it out. And then one day this company comes in and they kicked my butt nine ways to Sunday and who it was, was Geek Squad. Geek Squad decided to present themselves differently, and that is marketing, it's presentation marketing. Instead of wearing the scarecrow lanky suit like everyone else was doing, they wore flood pants, narrow tie, taped glasses. They became the superheroes of the industry. Today, Geek Squad, Robert Stephens is the founder, sold to Best Buy, and the cumulative value is a billion dollars, with a B, a billion dollars. Robert Stephens, the founder, shared something. He said, the more boring your industry, the greater the opportunity to differentiate.

David Phelps: Exactly. I think about that, and this is a generalization, of course, but I think in the world, we could find that the best marketers, those who do differentiate, who do stand out, Geek Squad being a prime example. Maybe not necessarily has the best services.

Mike Michalowicz: I would say they suck.

David Phelps: But you know what I'm saying, is the best marketers, oftentimes don't, but the best people who should have their services and products out there, they're hidden.

Mike Michalowicz: It kills me. Before COVID I was doing a lot of live presentations, now it's gone virtual, but I've been asked people the same question. I asked small business owners, that's who I speak to, are you better than the competition? Unequivocally, is that true? And the hands jump up. And I agree with them. The owner has integrated into the business, they care about the outcome. They're often providing the service behind the sale. They're learners. If someone's listening to your

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

podcast right now, David, clearly they're differentiating themselves from the mass who just is trying to plug through another day. You care more and you're integrated more, that's better. I say, it's the ultimate shame that we are better than our competition yet we don't market accordingly because if the client needs something, they're going to find a solution for it. But if they don't find us and they find inferior alternative, that is to the detriment of the customer. It's the customer's problem. But it's our fault for not having marketing accordingly. I would argue marketing is the ultimate act of kindness. If you really care, you would share what you do.

David Phelps: A hundred percent. I got to ask you a specific questions that'll resonate with a lot of my listeners. I'm a former dentist. I'm still card-carrying on, still trying to move to-

Mike Michalowicz: Still card-carrying, I like that.

David Phelps: There's more steps to move out, but no, this is my tribe. Now, we have a lot of entrepreneurs in other areas that have found us because I don't talk about clinical, anything. It's all about the business of, and that's what we're talking about today. I know you have teeth because I've seen them. I know you've probably have seen a dentist in your life. It's a very staid, a very professional profession and it's very industry-specific. The industry says, "This is who you are. This is how you look. It's how you show up." Just from your experience outside, a customer, a patient looking in. I mean, what's one or two, three things, just from your perspective as a patient, that a dentist might think about doing to show up differently?

Mike Michalowicz: Don't send me a birthday card with a tooth on it saying, "Time to come in for your cleaning." The first thing

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

to do is look at the established way that your contemporaries, your competition is marketing, and that's what not to do. It's called habituation. From the prospect's mind, when I see a repeated stimulus, that's the same and it's not relevant to me the first time, I won't even consider it the second time. The first time I got an email, I said, "Hey friend." Led off a hey friend. I was like, "Oh my God, who's this friend that's calling me friend.?" They don't even call me by my first name. They like me so much. As I read through, I'm like, this is irrelevant, smarmy marketing. I've never read a hey friend since. Well, in our dental practices, don't send that, you know what?

Send a real birthday card saying, "Hey, just wishing you a happy birthday. Hope you celebrate." And if you want to play a health spin, say, "You have healthy teeth. Why don't you have sweets on us? Here's a coupon to the local place because you've cared for yourself." Instead of saying like, this is a call to come in, this is a call to celebrate. Just that alone is different. The second thing is to do vendor networking, where do someone go when they need dental care and you can specialize in verticals. And I'm just kind of riffing here, but someone who's on television or celebrity really cares about their presentation. Why aren't you connected with all the agents that represent these people and you can market to them. And then you can build a package around them.

Once you know a specific community you're targeting, then you can start speaking their language, because most of us just say, "I care for everyone." Our marketing becomes very bland because it has to attract everyone. It has to be very surface level, but the more narrow you go,

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

you can speak to exact and specific needs on presentation or health or different elements. So, know who you're talking to. Don't do what everyone else is doing. Those two things alone are going to give you a big leg up.

David Phelps: You're so right about the fact that too much marketing is so generic, and it's the Hey friend. If somebody can't, and let's go to milliseconds next, but in that moment where my eyes are, or my ears are attracted to something, if that's not speaking to me, David, in some form of fashion that says, I'm unique to you or I'm a unique person, which I am then, like I said, I'm passing by. It's the habituation. I see that stuff everywhere. So milliseconds, how do we deal with that millisecond capture? What does that look like?

Mike Michalowicz: I think the most fascinating part of the research, at least for me, that I did for this book was how our brain processes information. Right now, David, in front of you, for the individuals listening, if you look around the space you're in, there's thousands of stimuli that's around you. Things that can grab your attention. I'm grabbing some here. I got to calculator sitting on my desk, but I'm not paying attention to it. Now I am because I picked it up, but I'm not paying attention to it because if I was, I'd be distracted and multiply that by thousands and we would be living in constant distraction. It would actually compromise our survival. Our brain at the base of it, there's a thing called the reticular formation. It has multiple elements, but it's like a web, both a figurative web, but also a literal web at the base for our brain, preventing inputs to come going through. The only three inputs that allows through are threats, if I plop down a gun

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

and say, "Hey Dave, let's go a little bit longer in this conversation."

Guarantee you got your attention. It may not end well. You'll probably punch me in face in response because you'll go into the fight or flight mode, but threats get through the reticular formation. The second thing is known opportunities. If I plop down a wad of hundreds or thousands and say, "Hey, can we keep talking?" I also have your attention, but I'm at risk that you may say, "Thanks for the money." And you're not really paying attention or you walk away with it. The only other way past this gatekeeper of the mind is by doing something that's unexpected. If we are outside talking in the yard, almost saying something squiggles on the ground, something we weren't expecting, our brains lights up.

The amygdala, that's our throat response jumps back we go, "What is this?" The prefrontal cortex lightens up and says, "I got to evaluate this. Is this a snake? Did someone just turn a hose on? Did a wad of money kind of go rolling down in front of me? What is it?" Well, in our marketing, there's three ways through to the brain. You can send a threat and listen, some people try to do this. Like, last chance, if you don't do this, you'll be sued. It gets attention. But the only thing is it causes the prospect to go into fight or flight mode. If you're threatening them, if you don't do this, here's a consequence. They may become combative. That's sounds that's very risky. Opportunities, I could send a mail out to everyone at the hundred dollar bill that's saying, do I have your attention? Techniques of reciprocity and so forth, but there's a massive risk, they pocket the money.

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

The other way, which is the lowest risk and highest return is the unexpected. If I send that lumpy mail, that something that invokes curiosity, the mind actually lights up and says, "I have to evaluate this. I can't stop myself. I have to know, is this a threat, opportunity or something not to consider, but until I evaluate it, I won't." All that stuff I just explained over three minutes, four minutes, that happens in one 10th of a second. I call it the blink test. If you blink right now, as fast as you can, your fast blink is slower, than our mind that operates unconscious thought of making a decision to proceed forward with something or not. You've one 10th of a second to catch tension, therefore do something that's unexpected, something they haven't experienced before.

David Phelps: Well, as you all can tell Mike, not only has degrees in business, but he has degrees in medicine. My point to you is, you did a lot of research. I mean, you do. You put a lot of research in your books. Certainly, it's experiences you have as in the trenches, business owner of multiple businesses and working with so many other business owners as you do, but you also put science behind this.

Mike Michalowicz: I did interview quite a few doctors, a little brain surgeon, behavioral psychologists, and so forth. I also tested out the theory. Theory is interesting application.

David Phelps: Yes.

Mike Michalowicz: I'll give you an example of something I did. The first thing to do with marketing is look at your competition and then don't do what they're doing. I looked at authors and when an author introduces a new book, we all, myself included, do email blasts. The email's always the same. It's black text, white background, buy my stuff. I said,

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

okay, if that's the common approach that's been habituated, people are starting to become blind to it. What could be different? I said, well, is that a black text white background? What if I did white text on a white background? What if I made it invisible? I sent out an email.

The first line was in black text. I said, this is perhaps the first ever invisible ink email you've received, click and drag below to highlight the text. If you drag your mouse over, it would reveal it. First of all, that's different. Second of all, it also complies with another component of successful different marketing which is, must be attractive. It hearkens back to when we are kids and you'd pass messages or use that marker and pen and so forth. That email, my open rates, I think more than quadrupled, and then people taking action was more than six or seven times who I've had historically, same content, different context. And that's the goal of different. It's not about being radically different. I'm not saying it to be outrageous. This is not gorilla marketing. You don't have to dress in a clown suit and go waka waka, when you go walking around, just do what no one else does. Make sure it's compelling to your audience and the chances for your success amplify. In this case, by quadruple.

David Phelps: Lot of people talk about customer-based referral marketing. What's good and what's not good about the reliance on a metric that says, how many referrals are you getting?

Mike Michalowicz: I think referrals are an extraordinary acknowledgement that your clients love you. Braggadocio is my first company before I started pushing on marketing,

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

pound my chest saying a hundred percent of my leads come from my client referrals. I don't even need to market, which by the way, my business was starving for leads. It was a very much a peaks and valleys thing. Then I came to realize this, that is the icing on the cake. If your clients are referring your business, wonderful. They believe in you so much.

They have actually decided to take on the responsibility of marketing, put it on their back your marketing, and carry it forward for you because they believe in you that much. It's the ultimate acknowledgement that you are great at what you do, but it also means you're at the whim of your customers to be your marketing arm. And if your customers believe in you that much, and if you're bearing the competition, you have a responsibility to market accordingly. Don't put the burden on your clients' backs. Take on that responsibility. They love you and they're trying to spread the word. Therefore, you must spread the word about yourself. You have that responsibility.

David Phelps: You've got a really good framework in the book. Mike, it's the DAD or the DAD framework. Let's talk about that because I think it's a very, very important one. It has a lot of the elements of what you talk about right there.

Mike Michalowicz: This is basically the checklist. If you can check off all three of these elements, the chances for your marketing be successful, skyrocket. If you miss even on one, you've crippled your marketing. The D stands for differentiate. We already leaned into this a lot. Don't do what everyone else is doing. The reason is reticular formation opens up, the mind consumes what's unexpected. A stands for attract. Different for different sake is not a good thing. Like

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

I said, you could dress like bows of the clowns, those big floppy shoes and go walking around. People will notice you, but is it attractive? And the truth is, we all know clowns are murderers. It's not attractive, so no one's going to buy. The A must speak to your audience. And there's a lot of different techniques. Houdini's book is the authority on this influence with the different things.

But I would say there's about 15 or 16 influential factors from curiosity to entertainment, including things like authority, social proof, and so forth. Those elements combined trigger the attractor factor. It's really this simple. Does your customer, when they read this or prospect say, "This speaks to me." That's the goal we're trying to achieve. Then you have the attraction. The only thing is just like differentiating. You got one 10th of a second to accomplish that. Attraction happens in increments of one 10th of a second. In fact, as we're doing this podcast right now, for the person listening, if you are starting to lose interest, that's a problem for David and me, we're losing you. That's why this podcast is not a 24 hour podcast. There's a certain point the attractor factor fades away, so we need to deliver rich content, powerful stuff to keep you engaged.

That's the attraction factor, and that applies to all marketing. Then once you have attraction as efficiently as possible, we want to move into the final stage, which is direct. Direct is where we give the prospect specific and explicit direction on what to do with this information. This is where we invoke the transaction. I'm not saying the final transaction. If I'm a consultant, I don't say, "Hey, you just visited my websites, give me \$10,000 deposit. We can talk." It may be, "Give me your email in exchange for

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

scheduling a time to talk or for some information I can provide you." There has to be some transaction. The key is this. It needs to be safe and reasonable for the prospect, but it also, the bows here matriculate or move for that final transaction for you, the vendor, as efficiently as possible. Don't do, you go to websites and it says, I visit website.

It says learn more is the call to action, horrible choice. The whole reason I went to the website was to learn more. Don't put me in this vortex of trying to explore, move me forward, but move me forward safely. And you'll have me as a customer.

David Phelps: Those last sentences you gave, I think are so important because we think that our marketing is supposed to bring that customer client right to us to do that first transaction. And that's generally far from the case. I mean, there's a few people, there's a very small percentage that have that great need to be taken care of. And if you're there and you look the part, yes, they will jump in. But most business owners miss that. And the fact is you said, we have to be more explicit in how we direct them to take that next, say step. Now, there's certainly a way if they want to jump leapfrog and go right to the front of the line and say, "Hey, here I am help me," but we've got to build that relationship. Without direction, or without specific, here's what you do next. I'm lost. I'm distracted by something else in a millisecond. I'm gone. I'm gone because I got distracted and you didn't tell me what I should do next. It wasn't safe. It didn't resonate with me. It didn't speak to me.

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

Mike Michalowicz: And the ultimate sin is if you lose them, you likely lose them for life. I mean, websites are a great analogy because we all have been to websites. But imagine a website that you've gone to just through some research, one you've never visited before. If it's not one of your regular top five sites, like the new sites or something that you're visiting, you're never going to go there again. Most experiences are a one shot deal. You need to get a transaction happening. And usually the first transaction, some form of permission marketing. I'm allowed to communicate with you through your cell or through email, through mailing you, through your address, but some way, some exchange where you give permission to stay in contact with you. If we miss that opportunity, we likely miss the opportunity for life.

David Phelps: A hundred percent. The book Get Different can be obtained, purchased from Amazon, certainly, but you also have a site where there's additional resources. It's gogetdifferent.com. Talk a little bit about the additional resources because you provide them in the book and you provide them here on the website. What additional opportunities can people have if they go to gogetdifferent.com, Mike?

Mike Michalowicz: And I'd argue, I think that's a starting point because the free resources have case studies. It's video-based case studies. I helped a church market itself, gyms, different types of businesses. But my favorite asset is there's a hundred marketing ideas. I gave you one, the invisible ink email. There's 99 more of marketing ideas that are no or very low cost and potentially high impact. Even if it doesn't you in landing thousands or hundreds of clients, you'll start building that marketing muscle, that's

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

the goal. Most businesses, most entrepreneurs I work with, if they do market, they do the best practice of the industry. They stay in that habituation zone and never get business. This will at least break you out of that. Once you break out of that, once you see the light on the other side, you'll probably never go back. You'll keep on doing different.

David Phelps: So one of my recommendations would be, anybody who's a business owner listening today. Number one, get the book, go to gogetdifferent.com. Buy the book for the rest of your team, especially anybody who interacts with the public, anybody who's part of who you are. Do the book study together. I mean, that's actually fun. It's innovative, but do the book study together, use the resources on the page and let your team also be a part. If you're the business owner, you can't drive this all by yourself. You've got to get the other people involved. And the way to do that is use the book. The book is fun.

Mike is always fun. He makes it fun. It's not going to be boring to anybody because Mike is not boring. I can promise you, if you get the book, your team will have fun with it because well, they want to be different. I mean, there's a mission. You have a mission, and you want your team, hopefully they bought into that mission. And they're the same way as Mike today. You're doing a disservice to the people you could serve, if you're not getting your message out there and differentiating yourself today, you're doing a great disservice. Get your team on board. It's fun. It builds a team work together and I think it's amazing. Another great, great book that you have out right now, Mike.

Ep #356: Mike Michalowicz - Get Different - How to Get Noticed in All of the Noise

Mike Michalowicz: David, I'm so honored to be on your show. Thanks for sharing that. And thanks for encouraging your audience to pick up a copy.

David Phelps: I'm a fan. I've lived it. I've watched it. I try to keep up with you, Mike. Every time I crest the next hill, you're another hill away.

Mike Michalowicz: I don't know if that's true. You are in a race on books. I got to start turning things up. So I'll get a new book out this year still.

David Phelps: Listen. It's always a pleasure. I'm glad that we get to get back together again, at least virtually from time to time. I missed the live meetings, but we'll hopefully someday we'll get back and get to do that again as well. Until then, have fun with this book. I know people who pick it up will as well. And thank you so much, Mike Michalowicz, gogetdifferent.com.

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