



# CAN TECHNOLOGY BE SEXY?



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***Technology Marketing can take many lessons from the effectiveness of human behavioral stimulation as it relates to visual appeal, attractiveness, and the “sales seduction” that is intended to ultimately lead to buying behavior. This article takes an inside peek at some of those concepts.***

To answer the basic question of whether technology itself can be sexy, then looking at it as a purely abstract concept like “Math,” which is a conceptual framework that doesn’t really have any intrinsic value unto itself apart from how it’s used – then no, not really, technology isn’t very inherently sexy. Engineers may love it, geeks may crave it, but to the average person, it’s just a tool, like a hammer or a screwdriver. Not sexy.

However, from a more pragmatic perspective, the “Adult” (i.e. sex) industry has long been one of the biggest driving catalysts of technological development. Video porn has literally been around since Thomas Edison invented the moving picture. Adult websites drove the proliferation of the Internet, as well as most of its associated byproduct technologies ranging from e-commerce to High-Definition streaming video.



But all of that is the ends not the means, and therefore that's not really what we're talking about here.

Our topic is focused on **Technology Marketing** and looking at a few concepts of how a technology company, i.e. one who produces software or hardware goods and/or computer related services, can make their offerings more appealing to the humans who make the buying decisions.

Face it, a 1U or 3U server chassis just isn't that exciting or appealing visually; nor is a CD full of whiz-bang software. What does a professional services "consultant" look like that is in any way distinct from any other generic business person?

**This is the marketing dilemma.**

Most Product/Service Marketing Managers will settle for making their offerings, packaging, and literature appear "cool" – i.e. making their products look sleek and visually stimulating like an iPhone or HD Gaming system. But how well that is accomplished is a matter of personal taste regarding what's deemed cool and what's not.



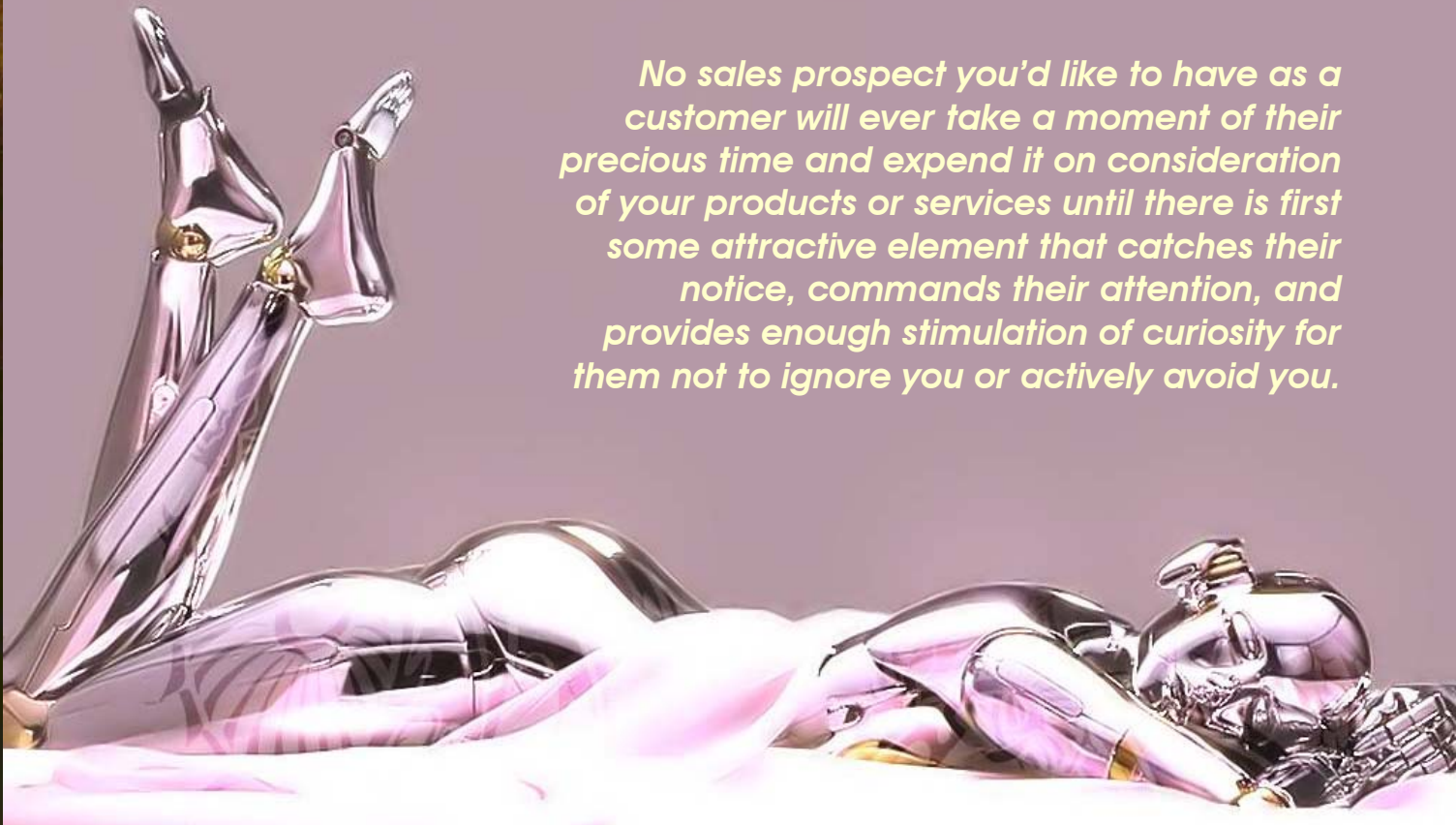
How do you make an ERP system look cool? Or sexy?

What about antivirus software? Or an accounting system?

Picture "Outsourcing." Any especially appealing visuals come to mind? Of course not. And that's the fundamental problem.

So what's a sharp technology marketer to do?

*No sales prospect you'd like to have as a customer will ever take a moment of their precious time and expend it on consideration of your products or services until there is first some attractive element that catches their notice, commands their attention, and provides enough stimulation of curiosity for them not to ignore you or actively avoid you.*





Well, one could argue that technology has no need to be “sexy.” Rather, in terms of presentation it should be professional, functional, provide solid business value, great performance, yada, yada, yada.

And that line of thinking would be to miss the entire point of this discussion. We’re not talking about “sexy” in terms of producing technology offerings that are somehow sexually “arousing” per se, but instead, examining the broader context of positive marketing appeal.

### Techno-appeal?

**Appeal** is an important concept because it is the precursor to interest. It happens from a distance, visually, and is that which triggers an active response to investigate, and based upon positive investigation, the decision to engage.

The word “sexy” is therefore applied analogously to denote the fundamental idea of “attraction.”

**The simple truth is this:** No sales prospect you’d like to have as a customer will ever take a moment of their precious time and expend it on consideration of your products or services until there is first some attractive element that catches their notice, commands their attention, and provides enough stimulation of curiosity for them not to ignore you or actively avoid you.

We refer to this catalytic element as a “Hook” – although, in reality, we really ought to be talking about the “bait” on that hook. And that’s the key.

The need to make your offerings appealing is easy to understand. How exactly you pull that off is the trick. As noted, most technology offerings in and of themselves just aren’t that exciting. So, again we ask, what can you do?

The answer is to affect those stimulation elements you have control over, and not worry about the ones you can’t. Consumer product marketers figured this out a long time ago.

Take beer.

Beer is a yellow or brown liquid, that...well, looks anything but sexy all by itself. In fact, unless you grew up in Germany drinking it as an infant from a bottle, then more likely than not,

your very first experience with it was less than delightful. In fact, if you enjoy beer today, you may recall a time earlier in life when you found it to be an “acquired taste.” Perhaps you “had to get used to it, before you could stand it.”

Think about that. How does a product that –

- resembles urine
- on first taste is bitter and can possibly make you gag
- is a biological catalyst for urine, and
- has the capacity to impair ones faculties to the point of criminal prosecution

– ever succeed in the marketplace?

One guess:



The breweries clearly figured out how to make their product attractive and “sexy.” [Notwithstanding, some folks just like to get hammered and beer is a means to that end.]

Obviously, the fashion industry broke the code on the use of attractive models eons ago. It’s a simple idea: take a product that isn’t very attractive all by itself and put it in the hands of someone who is. Attraction by association.



Human models also “humanize” inanimate objects and generic services. Think of it as “imputed” attraction. In the previous picture, believe it or not, the beer isn’t the first thing that’s seen. Actually, studies show that in a picture like that one, the very first thing that the viewers eyes go to is – no not the model’s shapely figure – her eyes (then her bod).

Human beings instinctively take a measure of other humans, especially with strangers, in terms of the countenance of their eyes and other facial expressions. It’s a natural “flee or fight” reflex. Does this person look friendly or a threat? If not a threat, are they attractive or unattractive? You can’t help yourself. It’s not even a conscious activity, but purely instinctual. And you better believe it’s taken advantage of by clever marketers.

So what do you then see in every beer Ad that’s made? Pretty girls, attractive cool guys, everyone having fun, lots of action, and often lots of humor. All of these elements infer pleasure and enjoyment. And that’s what the advertisers want you to feel and subsequently associate with their products – even if they make you sick.

Can technology companies make use of human models to attract attention and impute attraction to their offerings? Of course. Some do it more overtly and tacky like this LINUX promotion:



Whereas, others do it a little more subtly and professionally. If you go to Accenture’s Home Page ([www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com)), a leading business and IT consulting firm, you are likely to see a prominent image of Tiger Woods, their paid spokesperson as of the time of this writing.



When people see Tiger Woods, a handsome athlete and the top golfer in the world, they get all kinds of imputed positives to associate with his sponsors: a top competitor, a winner, incredible discipline and drive, professionalism, world-class accomplishment, history-maker, legend – all rolled up into one very *attractive* guy. He’s part of their marketing plan for a reason.

This is also why marketing promotions for banks and major financial institutions always feature older men, in suits, who look very polished, mature, trustworthy, professional (even if a paid actor) – portraying all the concepts the bank wants you to think they represent.





## Human Technology Marketing

So indeed, beyond just using sexy, attractive models to garner attention, technology companies can and sometimes do make use of “human marketing” techniques to increase the appeal and attraction of their offerings – to instill trust and prestige – to create positive conceptual and emotional associations.

But if you look for it, it’s surprisingly rare.

The vast majority of technology marketing appears to disproportionately strive for making an impression of “we’re so cool,” or “technologically brilliant.” Or their imagery is “gadget-based” in terms of flash animations and widgets on websites, or in the use of fractal art with still images. However, while the resulting impact on viewers can be an impression of “clever” and stimulate genuine interest, a first impression of “boring” or “cold” can be just as common.

Worst of all is when the engineers who develop a technology somehow also get involved with trying to market it. It’s easy to spot: overly verbose text with mystifyingly complex diagrams.



Are the people portrayed in your marketing? Your clients are People. Your Prospects are People. People do all the buying. People make all the buying decisions.

So in terms of pure Technology Marketing, i.e. making positive and appealing first impressions with new prospects in an effort to win new clients and increase market share, do you incorporate images of attractive people with friendly, welcoming, non-threatening eyes, who look professional, successful and convey a sense of trust and credibility?

If not, why not?

If the software you produce solves a significant business problem, do you have any imagery portraying real *people* enjoying the benefits of that solution?

If you are a professional services or consulting organization, then by definition what you sell is the service of PEOPLE. Is that what you portray, or perhaps you convey something else, something more abstract and ambiguous?

If you really are struggling with trying to figure out how to make your offerings more appealing to the market, perhaps the answer isn’t new packaging, new tag lines, or clever art or animation.

Perhaps it’s simply a matter of creating image-oriented messaging of desirable human associations and endorsements, emphasizing and illustrating the human impact of your value proposition and not the technological wizardry that causes it.

If so, then in this sense, technology solutions can potentially be made very appealing and desirable. And if you want to call that “sexy,” okay.