

Perception Versus Reality

The Matrix, though one of the best movies ever, didn't invent the idea of perception vs. reality. Discussion about the true nature of reality goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks.

Metaphysical discussions can be stimulating, but let's talk business. In this context, perception is what your target market thinks about your business, and reality is how good your business really is.

Can you get away with so-so service and results, as long as you can convince prospects that you are golden? Or, if your organization is really good, can you forget about managing perceptions? You already know the answer. For a business to outshine its competitors, it must invest smartly in both. Ignore one or the other, and it risks becoming either like the Con Man or the Invisible Man. Maybe you've had experience with companies like this?

THE CON MAN

A Strong Perception and Weak Reality

The business looks solid, and they promise to deliver exactly what you need. You feel you can trust them and are confident in your purchase. But when it comes time for them to deliver, you realize that the reality is weak and the promises were empty.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

A Weak Perception and Strong Reality

The best solution to your problem is there, but how do you know? You've never heard of them. You don't know what they're about and don't feel comfortable about them. They seem like a fly-by-night. Even if you were referred to them, are they going to still be in business in a year?

THE SALES MAN

A Strong Perception and Strong Reality

This company appears professional and successful, with a reputation and history that make you comfortable. You have seen testimonials from satisfied customers, and they have references and case studies to back up their claims. Best yet, they have proposed the perfect solution to your need, and they fulfill every promise and exceed your expectations.



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Sure, these are extreme examples, but they are meant to illustrate the point. The image a company projects through every touchpoint with the prospective customer—including sales collateral, sales reps, advertising, presentations, website, office, company logo and the way the receptionist answers the phone—is as important as the fact that the company can deliver on its promises and exceed expectations. The most successful businesses always have both.

Or, in other words, have something good to say and say it well.