



## As Seen on TV, P.T. Barnum, Penis Pills and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

*I confess that I took no pains to set my enterprising fellow-citizens a better example. I fell in with the world's way; and if my "puffing" was more persistent, my [advertising](#) more audacious, my posters more glaring, my pictures more exaggerated, my flags more patriotic and my transparencies more brilliant than they would have been under the management of my neighbors, it was not because I had less scruple than they, but more energy, far more ingenuity, and a better foundation for such promises. --- P.T. Barnum*

One of the greatest marketers of all time was P.T. Barnum who coined the phrase "The Greatest Show on Earth." P.T. Barnum was the absolute king of promoting various events during the 1880's and understood advertising and marketing concepts that are still in use today. He was able to make an absolute fortune by capitalizing on sensational headlines and arousing curiosity in various sideshows. He knew what people wanted to see and hear, and he aroused their curiosity. He used language and was able to create a sense of urgency so strong that people often fought to get into his shows. He was also a man of the people and able to identify with the people around him.

One of PT Barnum's greatest lessons, however, involves the importance of promotion. One of my favorite quotes is by P.T. Barnum is, "Without promotion something terrible happens: Nothing!" In fact, it is the people who are most successful at promotion that are able to achieve the most success in virtually every calling there is. Without promotion very little can happen. Businesses who do not promote go out of business. People who do not promote themselves successfully also fail to get the sorts of jobs they are capable of getting. It is a huge tragedy when people fail because they are simply unable (or unwilling) to promote themselves as they should. I wonder to myself if you, or people you know, are not living the life you are capable of due to an inability to effectively promote yourself. Many people are, and this is a massive tragedy. In fact, most people out there do not know how to successfully promote themselves.

Last night I went to Target with my wife, and I was pleased to see that they had several areas of the store that are now dedicated to "As Seen on TV" products:

- sandpaper you put on your hand that can remove all the hair off your body
- a tool to file down your dogs nails
- a blanket with holes for your hands so you can wear it
- scratch remover for a car
- a towel that soaks up anything, and can be used thousands of times
- putty that can glue together anything
- a carrot chopper
- a juice maker

There used to be an "As Seen on TV" store in Santa Barbara and, when I would go in there, I would spend hours and hours inside this particular store looking at stuff. These stores are my dream come true. I wish there were more "As Seen on TV" stores, and there were Targets stuffed with every good that had ever been sold on television. I would probably never leave.

Why am I so interested in the stuff that is "As Seen on TV"? I am completely and utterly fascinated by this stuff because, with extremely limited exceptions, all of the stuff being sold is complete junk that is being marketed incredibly effectively. The only thing any of these products has is that, somewhere along the line, an incredible [copywriter](#) and/or [salesperson](#) has gotten behind these products and endowed them with super human qualities. People line up to buy these things the same way people used to line up to see P.T. Barnum's shows. These products also appeal to the average person--i.e., all of us. The people who are marketing these products are absolute geniuses in many, many respects and they could teach you and I a ton about [getting a job](#). People that know how to market things really have an advantage in the world.

Before I go any further I want to make something clear to you. When you know how to package and sell something, you can do anything. The ability to sell is among the most important skills there is, and has ever been. More importantly, the ability to sell yourself is exceptionally important.

- When you can sell yourself, you can get any job you want.
- When you can sell yourself, you can get promotions.
- When you can sell yourself, you can help your company expand.
- When you can sell yourself, you are capable of incredible achievement.

You need to understand the skills of selling. If you can sell yourself, you can do anything.

Massive fortunes are made by the people who are able to market these products successfully on television. Do you have any idea how much money people make who sell this stuff on television successfully? It would absolutely boggle your mind. People who are able to take inanimate objects like this and package them are among the most successful people out there in marketing.

The woman who cleans my teeth in my dentist office lives in a modest suburb in Los Angeles. However, each week she takes some of the most outrageous trips you have ever imagined. Her best friend's husband came out with some sort of pill that he claims makes men's "private parts" larger and he advertises it in magazines, on television and other various locations. The guy has gone from living like an average Joe to spending his weekends taking his friends (and my dental

hygienist) to Rio, Cancun, Hawaii and other locations on his private jet. The guy apparently makes millions of dollars a month with his penis pill. He started out advertising in magazines, moved to television, and the rest is history. There is nothing in these pills but some common herbs and vitamins, but none of this seems to matter. It is his ability to sell this product that makes all of the difference. I can tell you that as far as I know, probably no [advertising executive](#) on Madison Avenue and in any of the largest advertising firms on the planet has a lifestyle like this.

You will not find most of these successful marketers (like the guy with the penis pill) working in large advertising agencies. The people who are marketing these products in infomercials and other areas are typically "outsiders" to the big corporate advertising firms. The reason is that most large advertising firms do not want to do direct response television advertisements where they need to be accountable immediately for the result. Large advertising firms and others prefer typically to do "branding" sorts of advertisements where the results the ads get are not really measurable. You would prefer to do this sort of advertising if you were a big advertising firm, as well. If you were a big advertising agency, you would not want to have to be accountable for the results of your work either.

However, the people who do direct response advertising on television, the people who sell penis pills and people like P.T. Barnum, all need to be accountable the second their ad runs. If people do not purchase their product, they do not earn money. Therefore, the people who promote these sorts of products develop the most outrageous and effective skills they can to sell these products and get your attention.

One of the most interesting facts, that has been true as long as I remember, is the fact that the *National Enquirer* is read by more people each week than *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, *US News* and several other publications put together. The *National Enquirer* is incredibly popular. In addition, some of the highest paid writers in America also work at the *National Enquirer*. The key to what they are doing is writing the headlines that appear on the cover. These headlines, as I am sure you can remember, are absolutely fascinating. But they sell magazines, lots and lots of magazines. While other magazines experience financial problems, people keep buying the *National Enquirer* in supermarket checkout lines to the tune of millions of copies a week. We buy the *National Enquirer* because it interests us.

An interesting article by Jay Gourley ran in the *Washington Monthly* in 1981 that discussed the differences between "quality press" and the "popular press." This article discussed that the popular press follows the motto "tell them what they want to hear" while the quality press tells them "what they ought to hear." Gourley wrote that, "Popular journalists generally see quality journalists as dimwitted and pretentious. Quality journalists generally see popular journalists as immoral and brash." This is a conflict that exists everywhere between advertisers selling penis pills and large pharmaceutical companies, between magazines like the *National Enquirer* and *The Economist*, and between large advertising firms and individuals out there peddling carrot peelers in 30 minute infomercials. However, I would submit to you that what ultimately matters is whether or not something is sold and people buy it. The most important thing is whether or not people buy something.

I am constantly amazed when I see people with very little intelligence or academic prowess come out with a book about this or that, and sell millions and millions of copies. It could be a story about a woman who spent a romantic night with a famous man and is writing a tell all. It could be a 200+ page book about a diet someone likes. There are so many ridiculous books out there it is difficult to believe. These people make millions of dollars writing books about the most stupid topics. Simultaneously, there are tons of books out there written by superstar academics that discuss stuff that is really important. These people are professors at the best universities all over the country. However, more than often we are buying the books about crap, than we are the books by the really smart people. What everything ultimately comes down to is whether or not something sells. It does not matter how smart you are, or how many degrees you have. It matters if you can get people to ultimately pull the trigger and buy what you are selling.

Recently, I have started to read and study the works of various copywriters. I have studied copywriters on and off for the past decade or so, but am always drawn back to their works for various reasons. These copywriters run workshops that they charge thousands of dollars to attend, sell binders full of other best ads for hundreds of dollars, and will basically sell you anything if you pay them money. Primarily, I am drawn back to the work of copywriters because I am amazed time and time again when I see products and people come out of nowhere to dominate the national consciousness. Because I am so interested in getting people jobs, the idea that the quality of our letter to an employer, a headline, or something along those lines can have an incredible influence on your candidacy and whether you end up getting the job of your dreams is fascinating to me.

There is also something to be said of the fact that when people are following the rules and doing things the same way others are, they may not be getting the best results they are capable of getting. This is true as well with your [job search](#). P.T. Barnum, infomercials, other sales people and vehicles outside of the mainstream are more often than not the ones who are actually moving products and selling lots of stuff. The writers for the *National Enquirer* are some of the highest paid writers in the world--not the writers for the *New York Times*. Everything is about the ability to arouse peoples' interest and get them to buy something.

The most successful people and marketers are able to get your attention. They are able to get you to part with your hard earned money and they are able to close the deal.

What does this have to do with your job search? It has everything to do with your job search. Your job search is no different than the conflict going on in the business world between traditional advertisers and the mavericks like P.T. Barnum and the guys with infomercials out there. What do advertisers like P.T. Barnum and "As Seen on TV" ads and others have in common? They grab your attention, make an offer that motivates you to act by picking up the phone, signing up (or whatever). These ads ask for action and they try and make the sale now--and not later. They know that their objective is to get you to act because if they do not get you to act

- ... they will not fill their circus with seats
- ... they will lose hundreds of thousands of dollars advertising their gadget

Traditional advertisers do not care what results they get (for the most part) because it does not matter to them. They are used to following the rules. They run "image" and not "direct response" advertising. This is a massive difference between what the people who are making the real money advertising are doing. In image advertising the results are not measurable. When you need someone to pick up the phone, or fill out an order form and order a product right now, you had better bet you are going to do everything within your power to sell the product as effectively as you can right now.

In your job search, I want to encourage you to think creatively and understand that you need to stand out with your

applications. You need to get employers' attention and get them to call you. You need to arouse their curiosity, and you need to have an offer that looks better than the next guy or gal. It may seem unusual to you that people are getting incredibly rich selling stupid stuff like pet nail files on television, but they understand something most people do not: It is all about the ability to package and sell something that matters. It is more important how something is packaged and marketed many times than what the product is. It is all about the marketing. Everything is about the marketing. Regardless of how good you may look on paper, regardless of how good your resume and experience are, if you do not package yourself correctly you are doing yourself a huge disservice.

### **THE LESSON**

Your success necessarily depends on your ability to promote yourself. To succeed in your job search, you need to find creative ways to differentiate yourself from the competition; in order for employers to call you, you need to grab and hold their attention. Proper packaging is the key to selling anything, including yourself; even the best resume will prove worthless if your presentation is shoddy.

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