

## **J. Michael Locke**

### **Musings**

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#### **#27: The First 90** **April 18, 2020**

Prominent senior living executive John Rijos once taught me about the “First 90.” John’s background is in hospitality and research has shown that consumers form 90 percent of their impression in the first 90 seconds and first 90 feet. So what are the implications of this 90/90 rule?

You need to have a world class website. As we have moved to a digital world, the first 90 feet virtually have become the home page. It needs to load superfast. In fact, Google penalizes your website in its search algorithm if your site takes more than a couple seconds to load. Google also evaluates if your website is mobile friendly. Viewers are more likely to be on an i-Phone than a desktop. The basic 10 second message you would deliver in an elevator ride needs to be clearly communicated right away. Your website needs to be easy to navigate so visitor can access the information they want quickly.

The first 90 feet obviously is a physical construct. If you have a unit model, make sure you have good landscaping and the outside of the building looks nice. I will never forget when I was visiting a location of one of our businesses and there were empty cans in the grass. When I asked the general manager about it, he lamented the quality of the cleaning crew. I demanded we get two trash bags and he and I walked the grounds picking up the trash! General managers need to “think like an owner” and do what has to be done. Unkempt grounds, dirty carpets, cluttered corners or conference table chairs spread in disarray are all simply unacceptable.

If you are running an office-based business, the first 90 feet is your reception area. What have you put on the walls? What does it say about your company and its culture? Pastel portraits should probably be replaced with client logos and testimonials or employee awards.

In this Covid 19 world, the first 90 feet might be your picture on Zoom. Software executive John Hughes was recently interviewing new marketing agencies and he shared how many of them had done their pitch from their bedrooms! To quote ESPN ....C’Mon Man! Reminds me of my visit to a potential datacenter and they took us to a conference room with a kegerator. Not sure I want my mission critical data there.

The first 90 seconds are usually a human interaction. Don’t be too casual about choosing the receptionist. Don’t make the mistake of viewing them as another administrative resource and assign lots of paperwork tasks. I have seen visitors patiently waited while receptionists finished their paperwork. Priorities! Jeff Bezos has credited much of Amazon’s success to its “Customer Obsession.” A customer should never have to wait while staff does paperwork.

Increasingly, the first human interaction is a call center. Again, don’t underestimate the importance of this role. Invest in your call center talent. While you need to ensure the productivity and measure call

time, don't let efficiency KPIs drive the culture of how the team engages with customers. In this "peer influenced" purchasing world, consider staffing your call center with individuals like the caller. For instance, use current students to help field questions from existing students. This is why the student-led tour has become such a staple of the college decision process.

While I don't know what will happen in the post-Covid world, the first 90 seconds have usually involved a handshake. No wet fish shakes. Nor should you follow Trump and try to establish dominance with an aggressive, pull them towards you, handshake (If you haven't focused on this, a fascinating little window on the President. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T84se4fc4KU>) Your handshake should be firm, eyes straight at the individual you are greeting. Simple stuff that matters. Teach your kids.

So over allocate time and attention to the First 90.

Be safe.

Jml