



The Seven Mistakes Most Inexperienced Marketers Make

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Right out of college, I assumed that marketing was like baking a cake. You had to have all the right ingredients and bake it just right in order to achieve success. After over 20 years in the field, I've learned that marketing is more complicated, technical and much less forgiving than baking a cake. While baking a cake, a few extra dashes of salt or a slightly miss-measured cup of flour won't change the outcome all that much. But in marketing, getting something wrong, it might not only fail, but cost you big-time with your existing and potential customers.

In working with clients both large and small over the years from Microsoft to new start-ups I discovered that marketing is usually just a game of dress-up using the latest "best-practices", while graphic artists design for awards and personal satisfaction rather than for the target market and the overall benefit and profitability of the company.

In my experience here is how most marketing plans run regardless of the company size.

1. The CEO determines that they need to increase sales and he or she mandates that the marketing department (or hired agency) come up with a plan.
2. The marketing manager remembers having good success at his last job with a particular campaign and decides he or she will try it.
3. The graphic artist is charged with developing something clever. He or she remembers seeing a really cool design in last month's CA magazine and he or she comes up with something clever.
4. It's presented to the CEO and he or she makes a few changes that usually have to do with making the company look awesome. This is the point where words get added such as: "new and improved", "unbelievable" and my personal favorite "unprecedented."
5. The campaign gets the stamp of approval and some time after that it gets launched; usually on a Friday afternoon (a cardinal sin).

The results of such an effort usually end with a minimal response and little or no increase in profits. The good news about such a campaign is that it didn't cost very much. It would be a shame to spend a lot of money for such a dismal response. I have been surprised over the years at the number of companies who invest so little in the growth of their practice and whose marketing activities only include a random, hit-and-run advertising effort.

In all industries, prospecting is a continual process. When you stop prospecting (advertising, marketing, etc.), your company begins to go into decline. This is because you never know when a current customer makes the decision to go elsewhere. Sadly, many professionals begin marketing and advertising only when their billings are in decline and then get frustrated when their marketing plans don't produce on their immediate time frame. Marketing not only requires time to effectively produce but also time to perform. It's impossible to know but I would wager that at least half of all marketing plans fail because they were cancelled before they matured. In our world of immediate gratification, we sometimes forget that like the harvest, we have to plant the seeds, diligently water and cultivate, and be patient. The farmer who pulls the plug and harvests in July, will starve come September. More on marketing and repetition follows below.

I have found that from the launch of a marketing campaign, to campaign exhaustion is on average two months (15 to 30 days for online campaigns). This means that whatever you're

doing, you should repeat it every one to three months. Sadly, what happens all too frequently is when the economy becomes uncertain, the marketing and advertising activities is among the first to go; the very thing that can improve poor economic conditions for your company.

If you've ever pumped water from an old water pump you will remember that you don't get water on the first push of the handle. In fact, you won't get water after the forth or fifth pump. If the pipe from the well is very dry, you might have to pump that darn handle dozens of times before water appears. I've seen dozens of companies stop pumping before water appears and dozens more stop pumping all together when a poor economic forecast is made. Successful and seasoned marketing-oriented companies have learned that you always have to keep pumping, because if you're not in the face of your customers, you are in fact out-of-site, out-of-mind, and invisible.

After 20 years of marketing, the following list outlines the common missed ingredients in all marketing and advertising campaigns.

1. Proper and adequate planning
2. Choosing the right marketing mix
3. Crafting the right message
4. Controlling the word-of-mouth campaign (understand the rules of engagement, and control the outcome)
5. Flawless execution
6. Repetition, repetition, repetition



PROPER AND ADEQUATE PLANNING

Confucius once said "Life is very simple but we insist on making it complicated." The same could be said for marketing research and strategy. Marketing planning can be confusing but it only consists of two very simple things, *research* and *strategy*. The single goal of marketing research is:

1. To understand the desires of the consumer.

And the single goal of marketing strategy is:

2. To exploit those desires.

This probably sounds like an over simplification but if you take your focus off these two simple goals during the planning stage, you'll miss your target, maybe by an inch, maybe by 1000 miles.

I love the movie Apollo 13 for its relentless problem solving. Running a successful, long-term marketing campaign is a lot like that movie. At one point in Apollo 13, the astronauts had to manually fire the thrusters in order to adjust their target for the earth since the computers were not able to be turned on. They quickly realized that an over-thrust of a quarter of an inch and they could miss the earth by 1000 miles. They made the successful burn by using the lunar module window and keeping a fixed target in sight, the earth. Not the most scientific approach perhaps but it was accurate and it worked perfectly. Sometimes during a marketing campaign, you'll have to make ad hoc adjustments that seem to go against your training, intuition,

research, company standards, and maybe even your company's policies. But make them and you'll be surprised (pleasantly).

I've never been a huge fan of traditional marketing research because it does not expose the truth. Beware of traditional research and the so-called "hard facts". Research does not usually expose the truth; it binds you to it. The reason why research can't be trusted is that people react differently when they know they are being watched and they spend hypothetical money very differently than the way they spend real money. Your goal for research is to learn the *true* desires of *your* customers. Traditional research, focus groups and the like, support mediocre ideas and kills the really great ones. This is because it is very hard to ignore hard evidence or the numbers. The truth is numbers do lie. You'll be much better off relying on the soft evidence.

Soft evidence is the stuff you gather while talking with a patient, client or customer. It's the chat on the phone with a customer and feedback on your website. It's the angry client that no one wants to talk to. Don't pay someone to form a group of hypothetical customers and ask them hypothetical questions or pay for very expensive "market intelligence" that was gathered in a community 1000 miles away from your customers. The best thing you can do (in the words of Harry Beckwith, world famous marketing expert) is hire a boy to tell you what your emperor is wearing, and then listen. The best "boy" you can hire is a marketing consultant who has learned how to listen and what to listen for. The boy will discover much about your company that would be forever invisible to you. Your customers will tell consultants things they would never tell you.

Be sure to conduct proper and adequate planning. By proper I of course mean the soft stuff. By adequate I mean you need to know when enough is enough. In my experience, excessive data inhibits decision making. You'll know you have enough data when new ideas start flowing.

I've also never been a fan of the so-called marketing "best practices". Best practices assume that everyone's company, products, services and patients are the same. They just aren't. Create your own best practices for your company. They're the only practices that matter anyway.

Use what you have, especially the soft facts. You would be amazed at how many companies I have worked with who spent thousands of dollars on research and then did not apply it to their marketing strategy. Such practices are more common than you think. I've often illustrated this blunder to my clients by explaining that it is like dating the entire Dallas Cowboys Cheerleading squad and then marrying your sister. If you have the data, use it in your marketing strategy.

As I said before, marketing strategy is simple. Design a strategy that exploits the desires of your customers. However, that is often much easier said than done. More than anything else, this is where a seasoned marketing consultant can earn you the most money and give you the biggest bang for your buck.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT MARKETING MIX

Unlike baking a cake, marketing is more like planning a trip to the moon. The most important thing when planning a trip to the moon is choosing the correct vehicle. As awesome as the Space Shuttle is, it could never get you to the moon. It just wasn't designed for that purpose.

Marketing is a lot like that. During the early dot com years, many believed that the Internet would be the end-all solution to marketing and that all other mediums were on their way out. Today, most would agree that such an assumption was ridiculous. While electronic marketing is very powerful it could be the very worst marketing choice for your company depending upon your target market, the age of your company, and your product category (see my case study at: www.pinemountain.com/business_at_7x.pdf).

Of course planning your marketing strategy includes planning which vehicles to use. Notice I said vehicles plural. Few marketing campaigns work well with only one vehicle. Whichever ones you choose, make sure they work in tandem and build upon each other. In the marketing world we call this “Integrated Marketing Communications” or just IMC. When IMC is not used your isolated marketing attempts will be much like trying to tread water using only one arm and no legs.

Choosing the right marketing mix is where a lot of companies go wrong. The reason for this is the basic human instinct to resist that which is unfamiliar. I love the saying that says, “For someone who only has a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” For the marketing department that only knows direct mail, every marketing need looks like a postcard. Hiring a seasoned marketer can also go a long way in this area in helping you choose the best marketing mix not just the marketing vehicles that are familiar to your staff. Chances are, an outside voice will have ideas and methods that you’ve never considered and never thought would work with your organization and chances are; it’s just what you need.



CRAFTING THE RIGHT MESSAGE

Writing effective marketing copy and marrying it with the right creative elements have never been an exact science and I doubt it ever will be. Try as we might, despite the number of customers and clients we talk to and the amount of money we spend on research, creating the “right” delivered message is an educated guess. However, there are some rules that when followed, you’ll never be too far off the mark. Think of this as the fixed object in space while burning your thrusters.

1. Speak confidently, make your customers and prospective clients believe they will be satisfied, and they will.
2. Beware of what your price says about you and your company and product/service. If customers come for your price only, they will leave you for someone else’s.
3. Be descriptive. Create an offer customers can see, taste and feel.
4. Make your customer sound important not you.
5. We are all attracted to beautiful things. Make your marketing and advertising beautiful.
6. To make and keep a client, make and keep a powerful connection.
7. Build trust and consistency in everything you do.
8. Get to the point strongly, confidently and immediately or you won’t get heard. Our time is extremely limited, especially when it comes to being sold to.
9. Be sure your customers know what you do for them. In the client’s mind, they sacrifice a great deal to do business with you. Your sacrifice for your customers, cements them to you.
10. Whatever it is you do, do it passionately. Passion is worth billions.
11. Keep it simple. One message per communication.

12. Write copy and create graphics that evoke trust.
13. Keep it real, keep it human.

The last two points require some in-depth discussion.

Write copy and create graphics that evoke trust.

The service industries especially have a unique obstacle to overcome in order to be successful marketers. That obstacle is the fact that your service doesn't exist until the customer or client purchases it. Before the purchase (or the agreement to purchase), what service company sells is a promise.

How convincing is your promise? How intriguing and how inviting is it? Does your marketing message sound trustworthy? Is your marketing promise strong enough to make prospective patients, clients, customers overcome their fears (legitimate and illegitimate)?

Unfortunately for inexperienced copy writers, crafting the "right" message is not as simple and intuitive as it sounds. One of my degrees is in psychology which was extremely helpful in learning about consumer behaviors and writing good marketing copy. For example, the worn-out phrase "what do you have to lose?" is one of the worst things you could ever use in marketing copy. Why? We human beings scan for and hold on to anything that could result in danger and loss. When we read the above statement, our psychology hangs on to the word "lose" and we turn away and psychologically run away from it. Much like a deer jumps when it hears a twig snap. Marketing copy is one of those places where getting it wrong could cost you. Crafting the right message is definitely a place where an experienced and well seasoned marketer is worth their hire.

Keep it real, keep it human.

Whatever marketing deliverable you create, stop and ask yourself, "Would I stop, listen and pay attention?" This is often a difficult question to answer since we all have a self-bias. One thing you can do to help ensure your marketing is being read is to make it real and keep it human.

As humans, we are naturally attracted to human drama and stories. Think about the most recent news casts you remember over the last few days, weeks or years. Why do you remember them? Why did you pay attention in the first place? Chances are it was because of the human element. The biggest trick to marketing is to make your service or product as tangible and human as possible. As you analyze all good ad copy, you'll find they humanize the product or service in some real way.

Social marketing and Web 2.0 are the latest buzz words in today's marketing world, both of which are strategies that center on the human element. For those who don't know what Web 2.0 is, it's a fancy way of saying, "using the web to socially market one's products and services." Web 2.0 and all the social websites like Facebook and Twitter are wildly popular because of their human element. The free exchange of stories and ideas fuels the millions of memberships on such sites globally, with numbers still increasing. Interestingly though, when you spend time on any of these social marketing websites, you'll find much of the conversation is one-sided. People love to talk about themselves. To be successful in this online space, don't talk about yourself constantly. Make your customer sound important, not you. Social media is not self-evident. Expert help in getting started is usually required if you want to make money off the venture.

When marketing is done right it is perceived as a service to the recipient. Remember this when crafting your message and designing your sales strategies. Whether or not your marketing was a service to the recipient will heavily depend upon your service and product delivery. Therefore, execution or delivery of your product is part of your marketing since it is the fulfillment of your marketing promise.

We've all had the experience of speaking with a salesman who doesn't know about the special pricing. Deliver what you claim. If your company doesn't stand up to your marketing claims or promise even just a little bit, your marketing campaign will run your company into the ground faster than anything else. If you claim to be a "child-friendly" practice, but don't offer any child-enhancing features, your marketing efforts will result in a slew of one-visit-wonders.

I once had a colleague who thought she'd try her hand at Internet dating. Not long after her bio was placed online, she was taking an all expense paid trip to Seattle to meet a special someone. Monday morning, she was back in the office tearfully explaining to her girlfriends how terrible and rude her date was. Being the inquisitive and curious type, I took a look at her profile online and I found what I expected. My friend was not the most slender of women, but was still attractive. However, her profile put her 30 pounds lighter than she was and her picture was at least 8 years old. We all seem to have a tendency to make ourselves (and our services) better than we really are, or at least we present them as we see ourselves. This is where the hiring of a boy to tell us what we our emperor wearing is extremely valuable. The story of my colleague does have a happy ending however. I helped her take some nice digital pictures of herself and I wrote her a bio in a second-person voice as a friend, focusing on her real qualities. She was very kind and sincere, with a funny disposition that made you want to talk with her. She was dating regulatng at the time I left the company and very happy with her personal marketing campaign.

Whatever you say about yourself and your company, it had better be accurate or you will be hurt by it, guaranteed. And whatever you do say, make sure you can deliver. I once saw a medical doctor because of a referral from a hospital. The referral (in the form of a post card) was actually very trite with worn-out marketing phrases and pictures of smiling heath care professionals. What caught my attention was the phrase, "We don't just want to be your doctors, we want to be your friends." It was something out of the ordinary (yes marketing strategy works on marketers too) and, being in need of a new doctor, I paid them a visit. The initial visit was pleasant and I soon considered him my personal physician and oddly enough, a friend. However, I sadly learned over the course of the next few months that my doctor's office staff was another story. Needless to say, I finally found another doctor because I tired of the poor treatment and rudeness. The saddest part about the whole situation was I might not have left his practice if I didn't first come to him with the idea that I was going to make a friend. Be careful what you promise. Be sure you can deliver.

Keep your marketing real. Keep it human. And keep it honest.



CONTROLLING THE WORD-OF-MOUTH

After the initial impact of your marketing efforts has surfaced, the ripples last much longer and are much more observable than the initial splash. In fact, it will be the ripples that will make the longest lasting impression on your target market. The ripples of your marketing efforts are the things about you and your company/product that get spread around the community by



word-of-mouth. Every time you make an impact in the market place, ripples will always follow. You make an impact in the market place every time you conduct any kind of marketing activity and every time you perform a service or sell a product. The trick to successful marketing is to control the ripples, or rather, control what gets spread via word-of-mouth. This might seem impossible since we have no control over what people say in private conversations. While we can't actually control what gets passed along, we can control the impact. If you can control the impact, you control the ripples.

If you get a group of men near a body of water no matter the age, eventually they will throw something in. It generally starts with small rocks and sticks but always progresses to the largest rock that can be found and heaved into the pond. The object with the largest surface area will create the largest and most pronounced ripples. Therefore, ripples can be controlled by controlling what you actually throw in and nothing makes larger ripples than bad news. Bad news always has the largest surface area.

In 1986, tampered Tylenol capsules were placed in a Chicago supermarket shelf which resulted in the deaths of six persons. The McNeil Corporation (the makers of Tylenol) was faced with a very large stone with massive surface area that had the potential to destroy the entire company if tossed into the marketing pond as is. What McNeil did was at the same time both brilliant and responsible. In fact, I can think of no other example of a company turning a catastrophic situation into a massive win than the McNeil Corporation.

Not knowing how wide-spread the tampered product was, and not waiting to find out, McNeil ordered the immediate removal of all Tylenol products off all shelves in the entire United States at a cost of millions of dollars. They immediately created a press release and blasted it to the nation and created a marketing message which aired on all networks. The message to both current and potential customers was to STOP USING TYLENOL. Even more, they encouraged everyone to discard all Tylenol products in their possession.

Without ever once saying "we care" in some corporate canned message, the McNeil Corporation announced to the world that their customer's health was more important than their company profits and their stockholders. By the time the stone finally reached the water, it was greatly reduced in size and the impact was minimal. The McNeil Corporation then pioneered the tamper-evident seals that all pharmaceutical products now carry. The company's actions after the initial impact added positive ripples which had the effect of disrupting the negative ripples caused by a disastrous event. If a multi-national corporation can overcome such an event and control the word-of-mouth ripples, your company can as well.

Word-of-mouth ripples can be controlled by:

1. Take immediate and responsible action when a negative stone is about to be tossed.
 - a. Put your customers first.
 - b. Whatever your actions, make sure they communicate that your clients are more important than your practice.
 - c. Whatever you do, do it for the humane and right reasons. Yes, you want to have a positive net reaction but if you're only doing the right thing for marketing reasons, your target market will see right through it. In this scenario, your negative stone just grew in size.
2. Take care that all marketing communication is consistent with your marketing strategy and communicates goodwill and trust.
3. Make sure that your creative is not offensive to your target market.

4. Never allow idle (negative) talk about patients, customer or clients in your office from you and your staff. Such talk always seems to find its way into the wrong ears.
5. Make sure your actions match what you're communicating to your target market.

FLAWLESS EXECUTION

I only include this since it seems to be one of the most frequently missed marketing ingredients and undermines everything else you do. What would have otherwise been a beautifully crafted marketing campaign melts down on the launch pad because the webmaster failed to test the website in multiple browsers and everyone using Firefox got a blank page, or the direct mail piece wasn't sent 1st class and the dated material arrived too late; both of which I have seen during my career.

Before you push the launch button on your marketing, make sure you have several people review it for accuracy and overall presentation. Even something as harmless as a misspelled word can undermine your credibility and your professional standing in the eyes of your customers. As mentioned above, make sure you can actually deliver what you promise in detail and long-term. Remember, when you market a service, the marketing continues when the prospective customer shows up at your business and long after they leave.

Lastly, before you get to the moment you push the launch button make sure that it isn't being pushed at 4:45 on Friday afternoon. The best day for a marketing launch is on a Tuesday. Stick to that day like glue unless you have very good reasons for choosing another day.

REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT

A hit-and-run approach never works in marketing. A hit-and-run approach never works in marketing. I'll say it one more time. A hit-and-run approach never works in marketing. The most common denominator among all inexperienced companies when it comes to marketing is their ignorance to this marketing proverb. I can't count the times I have sat down with a new client and they tell me of this other agency they hired that didn't do anything for them. As I dig deeper, I often find that they spent the time and effort to produce a campaign only to kill it before it had a chance to breathe. What usually happens in these cases is the CEO decides that they'll try this once, and if it doesn't work, we'll kill it. This is always a self-fulfilling prophecy. More than once in these situations, I have only made frivolous changes to the marketing campaign and mandated that it run X number of times and my clients are amazed. The truth is repetition and consistency is the real magic.

Whenever repetition is brought up in marketing negotiations (whether spoken or not) the feeling is that the agency only wants to repeat the campaigns so they can increase their billings. While this certainly works in the agency's favor, it is not the reason. Consider the following example.

You have a qualified marketing email list of 1000 names who have agreed to accept email from you. You craft an intelligent message about your new Intellisoft Mattress and blast it. After a few days you check the visits to your website and you only find that your visits increased by 4

people. The campaign might be labeled as a miserable failure and the agency would be fired. But consider this. Even with the most qualified list, consumers do not sit and anticipate your email nor do they drop what they are doing to run to your store. What do you think the chances are that any of the 1000 consumers on your list are in the exact right place, ready to make a mattress purchase when they receive your email? It's probably less than 1 in 1000. So what does this mean? Two things:

1. Get a bigger list (and perhaps a better qualified list) and increase your odds of hitting consumers at the right time.
2. Increase your frequency.

Rarely do consumers and marketing messages meet at the right time, but it's the company who advertises frequently that gets the sale. Why? Because when the consumer is ready, the company who has remained top-of-mind will get the sale. They will be the first company the consumer thinks of. Most company CEOs know this rule but they also think or at least hope that they can out smart it beat the odds and save money on advertising. The truth is you just can't.



THE BENEFITS TO USING AN EXPERT

When I was fresh out of college I like many young grads assumed I knew a ton about marketing, but I quickly learned at my first few jobs that there is NOTHING that compares with experience. After 20 years I've seen almost everything when it comes to marketing; what works and what doesn't. Many small companies make the mistake in assuming that marketing is obvious and anyone who knows how to use PhotoShop can create good advertising. It just isn't true and the money companies spend with the "trial and error" method costs them much more than their marketing budget.

Often the question companies' face is to hire an in-house marketing person or hire an outside expert? An outside expert is always preferred, here's why.

1. Generally, companies hire marketing personnel based upon their experience in the company's respective industry or vertical. The hired person (no matter how experienced) will then design marketing using the tools they have used in the past. If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.
2. An outside expert works on many different projects and campaigns across many different industries and verticals. When you consult with an outside expert, he or she will not see your company the same way you do or the way your in-house expert does. And this is a VERY good thing.

The hiring of an expert also has many benefits beyond the voice of experience. An experienced marketer can save you thousands in terms of time and effort, trying to figure-out your marketing strategy. A marketing agency can also secure better printing and advertising rates much like a travel agent can secure lower rates on travel than the average person.

Many marketing agencies (like PineMountain) own their own servers and can often provide free or greatly reduced hosting for all your electronic marketing deliverables. An experienced agency or consultant also knows the tricks to writing ad copy that will lead consumers to a buying decision as well as the right graphic treatment that will break through the clutter and



get your advertising noticed. An experienced marketer can also help you with your on-going marketing measurement allowing you to leverage every marketing piece you produce.

Marketing measurement is vital in your long-term strategy. Without accurate measurement, your marketing efforts are created in a vacuum and it is like starting from scratch every time you develop a new ad. Indeed, without measurement you really do not have any long-term strategy only a series of one-time efforts. Experienced agencies and consultants usually have processes in place to measure your marketing and most importantly, an expert will help you decipher what the data is telling you, why it is important and what next steps you should take.

Marketing measurement with an experienced agency or consultant will also show you if your marketing dollars are actually bringing more business through the door. It will also show you what marketing plans are working and which ones you should kill. Over time, marketing measurement will allow you to only spend marketing and advertising dollars where you get the biggest and best returns.

Robust marketing measurement programs will even tell you which types of customers or clients create the most profit for your business. Many business managers assume that all customers and clients are nearly equal and that the goal of marketing is to increase traffic. The truth is, not all customers and clients are equal. Some clients may even cost you money. Marketing measurement will help you identify the profitable customer segments and allow you to refer the unprofitable clients away. The money spent for a true marketing expert will always be well worth the price both in the short and long-term of your business.

About the author

Greg Meyers is a veteran marketer and business developer with his thumbprint on hundreds of campaigns and online properties. He has been a principal of several online marketing firms and has consulted for such clients as Hewlett Packard, Novell, General Motors, Volkswagen/Audi, Plantronics and Microsoft to name a few. He is currently the president (ranger) of PineMountain Marketing Inc. (www.pinemountain.com) based out of Providence, Utah. Forward comments and questions to: gmeyers@pinemountain.com.