

Avoiding Classic Marketing Missteps

Being a student and practitioner of marketing is actually much more exciting than you might expect. Perhaps your image of “the marketing guy” is some hyperactive, super slick person who calls everyone “bubala” and winks at people as he completes each sentence. Or maybe it’s the bumbling creative type image, the person that’s always getting into jams due to clumsy personal skills, the same skills that lead him or her to some creative stroke of genius.

We all have a relationship to marketing, some of us as professionals trying to position and promote product, but all of us as consumers who are targets of messages and campaigns designed to raise our awareness, win our hearts, and ultimately separate us from our dollars.

And in these pages over the last year (this is Tudog's 12th monthly newsletter!), we have presented a worldview of what good marketing should be – integrated, comprehensive, organization-wide, engaging, structured, measured and tested. What we have also tried to communicate is that all good marketing is born of a process of trial and error and that the creation of the appropriate environment by management is critical so that the marketing department feels secure while it indulges its instincts to explore and play around. We promote the idea that management must be tolerant of error if they are going to get the best out of their marketing department.

But there is a difference between following instinct, being creative and daring to be the best, and formula marketing tactics thrown together by marketers who either lack the will or creativity to do better. These marketers are able to throw together campaigns that seem like they touch certain target market buttons, but in fact do little to create brand, build relationships, or sell product. Insofar as these marketing mistakes are classics – they have been used and abused by not only small firms but also some of the most respected companies (and marketing firms) around – it is important to point them out so you can avoid them.

So here they are; Tudog's list of classic marketing missteps, and how to avoid them:

Misstep # 1: The Arrogance That Comes With Success

Success, even in small doses, drives confidence, which is a great thing until it reaches the level of arrogance and a refusal to see the world not as you do, but as your customers do.

Avoid It!

Remember, the larger your company becomes the more detached from your customers you become. Make sure you take the time to interact with your clients, and always keep in mind that as successful as you are, your client's needs must be met both in product and service. The company graveyard is full of companies that were successful and today are no more. Success means your doing things right, not that you can't do something wrong.

Misstep # 2: The Idea That Your Company Can Be All Things to All People

Companies usually excel at one or two things at most. The need to focus is accompanied by the need to remain identified with certain qualities and properties by our customers. Be too many things to too many people and you blur not only what you're saying, but also who you are.

Avoid It!

The best way for you to position your product is by determining which of its characteristics offer the greatest level of benefit in your targeted market. Then you review that benefit against your competitors to determine whether you will have exclusivity of concept with regard to the benefit you wish to promote. The need for exclusivity of concept precludes most other considerations, as it is essential for your product positioning that your claims be distinctive and emphasize your points of difference.

Misstep # 3: Trying to Copy the Market Leader

If you believe that you can replace the market leader by being like the market leader you are making an error in strategy. If customers have the market leader they do not need (or most likely even want) another company that does or claims to do the same thing.

Avoid It!

You need to focus on your competencies and the characteristics that separate you not only from the crowd, but also the market leader. Remember, marketing is as much about perceptions as it is about your product. You need to create the associations you want people to make with your product through your marketing effort. And these associations have to be distinctive and different from the messages being transmitted by the market leader. Remember, two companies cannot own the same qualities in the minds of consumers, try copying the market leader and you'll get lost in the glare of their dominance.

Misstep # 4: Research Results Aren't Always the Gospel

If you believe everything research seems to reveal you may find yourself marketing your products based on obvious, non-distinctive qualities (like "our hamburgers taste great"), or qualities that have already been captured by other companies (and we already know two companies can't own the same qualities in the minds of consumers). Research only tells you what customers want to hear, not what you should be saying. And no matter what some appeasement marketers claim, the two are not the same thing.

Avoid It!

Use research as only set of the information you require when creating your marketing strategy and message. Make sure you consider other key elements, such as competitor messages, key product benefits, company positioning and other aspects that will serve to position your company and products as distinctive. Remember, every need has a variety of angles, for example, the need for a knowledge management product could be marketed with speed of information retrieval or easy to control taxonomy or compliance encouragement mechanisms or other benefits as the core marketing message. No

product can claim all these positive attributes. See which one suits your product, is not owned by a competitor, and run with it as your core message.

There are indeed other missteps one can take in preparing, launching, implementing and adjusting marketing campaigns, however, these four are fundamental errors that, if not avoided, will effect the soul of the campaign. These are not missteps that constitute healthy trial and error, but rather mistakes that need to be avoided because when committed they corrupt the entire campaign.

So focus on distinctive competencies and create your own image. Your customers will reward you. They'll buy your products.