

Bad Marketing

There is nothing more critical to the financial well being of your company than good solid marketing. Conversely, there is also nothing more detrimental than bad marketing. Beyond the lost opportunities bad marketing causes, it also can serve to position you poorly in the market, mislead or misinform consumers, alienate a portion of your targeted market, or, perhaps worst of all, encourage apathy toward your company and its products.

The reason it is so important to monitor how well your marketing is performing is so that you will be able to react swiftly when all indicators point to a decline in efficacy. There are clear cut signs that signal that your marketing has gone stale. Ignoring them will cause you harm in the marketplace. Rejuvenating your marketing will give you new presence. This article will discuss the signs Tudog uses to recognize stale marketing, and the tactics we deploy to give a marketing program new life.

It should be noted that there is a difference between bad marketing and stale marketing. While it is true that stale marketing has become bad marketing, it might not have always been. This is not a semantic difference we are discussing. Bad marketing may actually be less damaging to a company because there has never been a consumer expectation of good communication. For the most part bad marketing is simply ignored, or at best tolerated by the public. Stale marketing, on the other hand, may actually cause greater harm because the market has come to expect better.

When is Your Marketing Bad?

Understanding when your marketing is bad is the second step toward good marketing. The first step is caring. All too often Tudog has pointed out marketing that was, to be polite, in need of improvement, only to find that the company disseminating the trash was perfectly satisfied because, as they put it, "it's working...sales are up". Tudog has tried, under these circumstances to explain that there are short term and long term reactions to marketing and that, while sales may initially be up, the long term effects of bad marketing last a whole lot longer than any initial upturn. Your company needs to strive for marketing excellence. Doing so requires you be aware of when your marketing is bad. Some typical signs of illness include:

1. When The Focus is Wrong

The purpose of your marketing is to communicate either a benefit statement. Take, for example, the excellent market for Apple's iPod. While not coming outright and saying it, the ads for iPod communicate the benefit of having your favorite music with you on a portable and digital machine. The benefits include joy, freedom, and even a sense of feeling young. Your marketing is bad when your focus is on something other than benefits. Some focal points that often mistakenly misplace benefit include:

- A focus on the owner (who can't resist trying to be a celebrity).
- A focus on the business and its history (not to demonstrate experience or stability, but rather, again, to play up to ego).
- A focus on something very current in culture (in an effort to be current, but without any statement of benefit).

2. When You're Providing Too Many Facts

Nobody needs to know everything there is to know about your product. You need to express the benefit you provide (and extension of the problem you solve), and a bit about how you do it. Your information needs to be enough to provide credibility to your claims, not to give a PhD dissertation to your customers. Too much information confuses, intimidates, and may even have people wondering if you're providing all this information to compensate for some deficit your product may have. Keep it simple, direct, and focused.

3. When Your Marketing is Reactionary

Sometimes there are fads in marketing, such as ads that scream at customers, or sarcasm and attitude. Joining the bandwagon is not a particularly good idea. First of all, it does little to differentiate you from the rest of the shouters. Moreover, it signals a lack of imagination that you don't want associated with your company. You are a leader. People copy your marketing style. Not the other way around.

4. When Your Marketing is Superficial

Consumers need a mix of quality, value and image in the products they buy. Too often companies will sacrifice communicating value and quality in order to focus on image. This is a mistake because it speaks only to the narrow market that is strictly image oriented, excluding the larger market that requires that their quality/value needs be addressed. Your marketing should have meaning because your company has meaning and you want the consumer to make the connection between the respect you assign to your company (and your pride in it) and the products you produce.

When is Your Marketing Stale?

Stale marketing can be a result of staying power, meaning that you have not changed your message or your advertising in a very long while. In some cases, this is not a bad thing, as the basic message is so powerful that there is no need to change it. Nike would be an example of this. On the other hand, McDonald's changes its message every few years or so and typically finds it has an extremely positive effect on sales. You'll know when your marketing is stale when people stop listening to what you're saying. Other hints your marketing is stale could be:

1. When You Sound Too Desperate

If your communications have been played out, they could be outdated to the extent that they are relaying a sense of desperation. You do not need to be cutting edge, but you can't be unintentionally retro to the point that you are a joke. Similarly, if you are too focused on the sale, meaning you seem to be desperate for customers, you similarly are transmitting a message that will scare customers away. Consumers want to have confidence in what they purchase. A great deal of this confidence has to come from you.

2. When You've Run Out of Something to Say

If you have run out of good things to say about your business you are suffering from stale-marketing-itis. If you're bored with your company, why shouldn't your customers be too? You need to make sure that you seek out fresh ways to communicate your core messages (based on your benefits and the needs you meet). Remember, if you do not refresh your message, a competitor will be more than happy to say what you should be saying, taking not only your message, but your customers too. Just like with product development, if you don't make yourself obsolete, another company will. Keep your message fresh and keep the competitors at bay.

3. When You Show No Enthusiasm

Your marketing is entitled to pizzazz. You need to demonstrate enthusiasm so that your excitement becomes contagious. If you're bored by what you're saying, why shouldn't the market be bored too? Stale marketing has boredom pouring through it, almost like the marketing of your company is a chore and not an expression of the company's eagerness to meet the needs of its market. You need to relay the idea that there is nothing you would rather be doing than selling what you're selling to the people you're selling to.

4. When You Stop Communicating Commitment

Commitment is demonstrated in a number of ways; the service you provide, the value you offer, the selection you present, the atmosphere you maintain, and the reputation you uphold. If you stop demonstrating commitment because your communications have gone stale you run the risk of undermining the perception of commitment you so carefully constructed through your dutiful attention to all other commitment related details. Your marketing needs to reflect that you are paying attention to it, crafting it with forethought, and tending to it so that it is effective. This sort of commitment will be seen as an indication of the care you give to all aspects of your business.

Rejuvenating Stale Marketing

There are a number of steps you can take to (a) make sure your marketing doesn't turn stale, and (b) rejuvenate your marketing if it has gone stale. Consider the following:

1. Schedule Reviews

It is helpful to place within your marketing plan scheduled reviews not only of performance, but also of message freshness. By doing so you pre-empt learning from the market that your message is no longer considered worthy of response or reaction.

2. Be Assertive

Make it marketing policy to be assertive and incorporate into your policy the notion of periodic changes in message and market focus. By doing this you can be certain that you will not fall into the traps of reactive marketing or complacency.

3. Be Creative

Don't be intimidated by the creative process. While you need to make sure that your creativity is consistent with your overall company image, you probably have a much greater range of creative options available to you. Use them.

4. Make Marketing a Priority

Marketing gets stale because it is not being tended to with the same level of importance assigned to it as other aspects of the company's operations. Your focus may be on your bottom line, costs, efficiencies, and other finance related matters, but until you can answer where the revenue is going to come from without marketing, you had better make the breadwinner (marketing) the priority.

While there is no excuse for bad marketing there sure is no shortage of it either. It may be easy to try to get by with bad marketing, but it's just as easy to have exceptional marketing. When you look around at the major players and you see the brilliant marketing they engage in, don't you stop to wonder why?