

## Establishing Your Honesty

Over the years I have demonstrated extreme levels of crankiness over the seemingly complete abandonment of honesty in marketing. Beyond the ethical issues, it seems most marketing professionals have forgotten that we rely on the public's trust in order to succeed. Once our credibility is gone, and no one no longer believes the claims we make, we can all go home, because there will be no purpose left to what we do.

The notion that we somehow need to expand the boundaries of truthfulness in order to get people to buy our products has never been validated. People buy products that serve needs, fulfill the promises made, are offered at a fair price, and are easily accessible. Nowhere in this equation is there anything that indicates we need to trick our customers. Yet it is happening everywhere – from debt consolidation companies that use a not-for-profit status dubiously, to car dealerships that claim to be selling cars at no profit – the marketing profession has somehow lost its way.

The demands on a marketing team are tremendous. They are charged with creating awareness and generating interest in the products their company sells. They are often devoid of appropriate budget, and are being measured by sales volume statistics that are not completely under their control. All of this may lead to desperate measures, but those measures still need to preserve the integrity of the marketing profession and reside within the means of the ethical.

Perhaps too many marketing divisions are populated with non-professionals. Or perhaps the love of marketing is no longer a consideration when selecting a marketing major in school. Whatever the cause, marketing is in a crisis mode, and unless we teach ourselves how to be honest again, we will find ourselves one small rung above lawyers on the list of sleazy jokes.

So how do we regain our honesty? First of all, we admit to our failings, confess that we have given in to temptation, and we vow to struggle against the urge. Then we recommit ourselves to the fundamentals of quality marketing.

To keep us on the straight and narrow, here are 8 suggestions we might all want to vow to adhere to:

1. Let Us Always Provide Complete Information

It does not do us proud when we make claims or present offers that are incomplete in the information they provide, thereby intentionally leading the consumer to make an (anticipated) incorrect assumption. This is just plain bad marketing. Do you think the customer won't figure it out once they come in to make the purchase? Do you think you earned any good will by tricking the customer and letting them know that (ha ha) you managed to trick them? If your offer stinks, then don't offer it. Create a new offer that has genuine merit and is truly attractive to the customer. If you have nothing to hide, then maybe you won't hide anything.

2. Let Us Always be True in our Actions

Consumers have a right to know what to expect every time they interact with us. We should not be shrinking packaging and reducing quantities because we don't want to raise prices. We should not be offering rebates that we then make logistically complex to redeem. We should not be offering products at discount prices only to have consumers seek out the product, learn there are none left (there was only 1 to begin with), and then subject them to an up-sell pitch. We should be honest in our actions, as they are genuine reflections of what we are as businesses and who we are as people.

### 3. Let Us Always be Accurate

There is an assumption in marketing, somewhat new, that approximately 85% of the truth is all that is required. It seems that phrases like "up to" and "not typical results" are being used to hide the lies the consumers are being shown. Why show ordinary people atypical results if the intent is other than to mislead? Why not show typical results and create in the mind of the consumer realistic and reasonable expectations? Is it because no one will buy your product if you reveal the typical result? How long do you think you can lie your way into profitability? Let's go back to being accurate and let's allow our products to be judged on their true performance.

### 4. Let Us Always be Clear

Is there any way to explain, in marketing terms, the logic of the cellular companies? Is there a reason they have created complete confusion with regard to their service offerings? Is there any reason they punish loyal customers by charging them more than customers they are seeking to attract now? The cell companies are just one example of the havoc that is created in the name of marketing. The result is zero consumer loyalty, extreme dissatisfaction with service, and a cell penetration rate among the lowest in the world. Way to go marketing geniuses! We need to be consistent in our offers because consumers, old and new, do not like being made fools of and do not like being taken advantage of. The complexity of the programs, and sheer number of programs, is designed to confuse and exploit.

### 5. Let Us Always Be Reasonable

Sometimes a marketing campaign can get away from itself and the claims made are somewhat exaggerated. Yes, this actually happens sometimes. These claims, whether they be for fitness programs, self-help, diets, or automobiles, often go beyond the already extended limits of truth. If we can't be completely honest (because then maybe no one would buy anything), let's at least restore some semblance of reasonable white lies.

### 6. Let Us Always Avoid Contradictions

We have this horrible habit of giving something to the consumer with one hand and then taking it back with another. Our "terms and conditions" coming at the end of our commercials often deem the offer set forth in the advertisement as impossible to obtain. So we first make an offer and then we establish the conditions to receive that offer so that no one can ever take advantage of it. But they'll think they can and they'll come to our shops. And then we'll tell them they're not eligible and they'll be okay with that. In fact, they'll still buy the product they intended, only at a much higher price than they

expected. Have we gone insane? Let's set the terms of the offer to meet the public toward which the offer is aimed.

These are not hard rules to live by. It only requires of us a commitment to honest marketing and a faith that our products are good enough to sell, even when we tell the truth.