

Fun as a Marketing Driver

It is easy for marketers to lose track of the concept of fun as they vigorously pursue the creation of an environment that will lead to increased sales. The irony is that the fun they are overlooking could very well be the instrument for improved sales performance that they are so forcefully chasing. While many companies have come to see humor and fun as a helpful tool in their marketing mix, other companies have yet to draw the same conclusion. Fact is, fun and humor are extremely powerful and effective marketing drivers.

Not only do we all like fun and want to have fun, but we tend to lower our resistance while we are having fun. If, as is widely suspected, most people have learned to tune out and ignore most marketing messages, then the incorporation of fun and humor could be a way to get them (at least some of them) to start tuning back in.

Similarly, since most people have come to distrust or at least suspect the accuracy of marketing claims, the inclusion of humor and fun serves to lessen the seriousness of the message, which in turn makes it much easier for the targeted market to ultimately believe and accept.

Also, the use of humor and fun in our marketing could lead to people anticipating viewing our messages because they enjoy and are entertained by its content. It could lead to people passing on ads to others and creating a small scale viral buzz on the ad and the product. In both cases the result is that the message is being viewed more often and with more receptivity.

Fun can be illustrated in ways other than with humor. It is also fun to be carefree, adventurous, easy going, happy, and impulsive. All these images are joy inspiring and are welcomed additions to the stress ridden lives of most people. The use of these images and the expression of these messages serve to draw the targeted buyer into a sense of neutrality where he/she is willing to consider the prospect of moment of relaxation or fun.

There are a number of ways fun can be incorporated into marketing and used as a primary driver. These include:

1. Provide an Actual Fun Opportunity – many retailers and restaurants, for example, provide their customers with actual opportunities for fun even while they are engaged in the buy decision process. For example, The Sharper Image has its stores set up as mini-playgrounds, where shoppers are free to try out the products, relax in massage chairs, and play with innovative gadgets. The result has been that people stop by the store just to play, often making a purchase they had no intended to make when they entered. This sort of opportunity for fun serves to loosen the customer up, lower resistance, and make the possibility of the sale greater. The fact that in this instance The Sharper Image is also engaging in clever experiential marketing makes the tactic all the better.
2. Focus Your Humor – the use of humor in marketing is a well document and confirmed tactic. The use of humor can be applied to just about any product, but certain products can be well matched with certain types of humor. Marketing targeting specific demographics should look to incorporate humor that is particular to the group being

targeted. There is no need to be afraid of being outrageous as long as the humor is actually funny to the intended target. Humor, like all cultural elements, isn't always universally funny. The humor needs to match the culture of the target. As long as it does, it will most likely serve you well.

3. Have Fun Implementing – there is an ice cream chain called Cold Stone Creamery. Every time a customer gives a tip the employees sing a song. It is fun and customers find themselves dropping a dollar or two in the jar just to be part of the game and hear them sing. This sort of fun in implementation makes the entire experience of visiting the store fun and keeps customers coming back for more. Fun in implementation need not be restricted to products that are fun-friendly (like ice cream). Best Buy stores have a service for computer repair they playfully called The Geek Squad. The computer experts dress like geeks, complete with pocket protectors. It works because on some level we want a geek to fix our computer because we assume a geek has a high degree of expertise. But the fact that it is implemented in a fun way takes some of the stress away and transforms an otherwise serious matter into a playful one.

4. Have fun yourself – if you are having fun people will sense and have fun from your fun. There is a chain of Tex-Mex restaurants called Moe's. At Moe's you are greeted by a shout sort of similar to the one that greeted the crowd at Cheers in the old television series. The employees at Moe's seem to having a good time. This makes the experience more enjoyable because it allows the customer to have a good time too.

Fun does not have to be restricted to companies that are able to have one on one interactions with their customers. Fun can be communicated through marketing messages, packaging, product design and even in the name of the product. As long as you have the quality and perceived value necessary to succeed and you deliver on the promises you make, the addition of fun elements will only serve to enhance your position in the market.

The idea no one will take you seriously if you do not take yourself seriously is nonsense. People will respect your ability to lighten up. And they will reward you with their business.