

## Liar, Liar Business on Fire

It has never ceased to amaze Tudog when marketers lie. Do they think that – assuming the lie works – the customer won't realize they have been lied to after they try a product that see that it doesn't meet the promises made? And when marketers intentionally mislead people to open mail or order a product, do they think that tricking the customer earns them anything other than disdain? When did our marketing objectives go from building long term relationships with our clients to being short term grabs for a one-off buy by customers we know we'll never see again (because we tricked them into being our customers)? We can't say it clearer, lying and misleading is bad business. Period.

The road of lies in marketing is scattered with many “clever” schemes that tricked consumers into buying because they were misled. Some really smart marketers fool people into opening direct mail by making it look official. They somehow think that once it is open the mediocre offer inside will compensate for the bad feeling the consumer has for having been fooled. Then, of course, there are the half hour paid programs (once upon a time called “commercials”) on television that aim at the lowest intelligence levels while insinuating promises in qualifying language so as not to be called liars when the truth comes around.

You can call your used car “pre-owned” if you think your consumers prefer the sound of it. Nothing wrong with some creative language. The pre-owned concept worked because alongside the softer name for a used car came greater service, a better buying atmosphere, and some additional assurances. There was no lie here. There was great marketing.

The challenge for marketers is that the role they play seeks to persuade and with new technologies that measure results, the pressure is on to persuade in greater numbers. Add to this the “grow at all costs” mentality of most businesses who measure success by the dollars earned month to year, and you have all the ingredients you need to turn a generally honest marketer into someone seeking to stretch the boundaries a little bit further than they should be.

So what are these boundaries and how do we stay within them? Tudog has 4 suggestions and 3 guidelines. Follow these and you should be not only within the scope of honesty, but also with the range of good marketing.

### *The 4 Suggestions*

**1, Communicate Accurately What the Product Delivers** – consumers buy things because they either meet a need or satisfy a demand. If you communicate truthfully what your product can do you will find the market that needs or wants it. These people are your customers. Trying to get more customers by exaggerating claims is silly because you will not only lose those who bought your product because of the improved claim, you will also lose those who would have been loyal if you would have stayed modest.

**2. Meet All Your Promises** – there is no reason to say your product does something it cannot do. There is only a short span of time between your claim and the discovery of truth. There is also no reason to select best performance scenarios and promote them as the expected result. This too will only lead to disappointment. You need to keep in

mind that you only get one chance to make a customer unhappy. Unhappy customers are usually called x-customers.

**3. Get Constant Feedback** – you should make it a habit to get feedback from your customers as often as possible. First of all, you will be gathering great testimonies to be using in your marketing. These real thoughts on your product offer you third party legitimacy and can be a powerful tool in getting a genuine statement of benefit communicated. Also, by speaking with your market you may discover additional benefits being realized by your customers and different ways your customers are using your products. These too can be excellent ways to supplement your marketing and expand the base of your market.

**4. Give a Guarantee** - one of the best ways to keep yourself in line is to make a guarantee that you prefer not to honor (but that you will every time it is necessary). For example, if you promise double money back, you will be sure to do everything you can to keep the customer satisfied so that they don't call in the guarantee.

### *The 3 Guidelines*

Keeping yourself honest also means adhering to certain rules or guidelines. Tudog recommends:

**1. Follow the Law** – maybe a silly thing to have to remind people to do, but nonetheless there are hundreds of examples where companies need to be brought back to the right side after allowing their marketing to stray over to the side of outrageous to the point of illegal. The Federal Trade Commission is mandated by the government to make certain that marketing does not try to deceive or mislead consumers. If your claims are false or your offers are insincere, you can be called to the carpet. And it makes no difference if your falsehoods were lies of commission or omission. Either way, when you cross the line, you are no longer considered legitimate.

**2. Puff it Up** – there are lies and then there is humor. Puffing it up is lying big time, but it's an okay way to lie because everyone knows you don't mean what you're saying. In most cases, like the old Isuzu commercials, the humor is obvious and the fact that the lies are bold makes it clear that there is no real intent to mislead. The puff rule is an important one to follow. If you're saying something untrue and it is not meant as a joke, you know you are crossing the line.

**3. Lay Off the Competition** – the greatest temptation, when it comes to stretching the boundaries of truth in our marketing, revolves around the things we say about our competition and the way we compare ourselves to the competition. The best way to avoid getting caught up in lies is to resist the temptation and not talk about your competitors directly. You can focus on points of difference between your products and "the others", and you can even talk about how you are better, but you don't need to name names when you do.

Honesty is a strategy. Dishonesty, by extension, is a strategy as well. The pursuit of dishonesty is not only ethically wrong, it is a poor business decision that demonstrates not only a lack of business acumen, but also a lack of vision. The idea that fooling people will lead to sales only demonstrates how little you understand about sales. And if

the dishonesty isn't the reason why people won't do business with you, your clear lack of understanding of how to do business will be.