

The 10 Biggest Marketing Mistakes Organizations Make

By John Fries

When I meet with a potential client or give a presentation, I ask CEOs or business owners what they have been doing to create awareness of their organizations, products or services. Because they might not know how to do effective marketing, they often they say either that they don't do anything—which is a huge mistake, since marketing drives sales—or they say they “tried” this or that with no results, because they didn't execute their program with a strong strategic or creative direction.

Following are the ten biggest mistakes companies make with their marketing efforts.

1. **No value proposition.** Call it a unique selling proposition (USP), a brand or simply that thing that makes your company different from your competitors in a way that means something to your target audience/customers. You'd be surprised at how many businesses don't consider articulating, then leveraging, their uniqueness to establish and ultimately own their niche in the marketplace.
2. **Not realizing what they're really selling.** Sure, your tangible deliverable is a product or service, but what are you really selling? Convenience, the solution to a problem, efficiency, or something else? Apple, under Steve Jobs, sold innovation and minimalist cool while their competitors were selling phones and MP3 players. And they blew away the market. Howard Schultz, chairman of Starbucks, emphasizes that the company doesn't sell coffee; what it really sells is a third place for people to gather after work and home.
3. **No (or too small) marketing budget.** Companies that succeed are usually the ones that build the foundation for their futures by realizing that strategic marketing expenditures are investments. How you budget for marketing purposes depends on the objectives you want to achieve. Walt Disney was a creative visionary whose brother, Roy, controlled the purse strings. In Neal Gabler's excellent biography of Walt, he describes how Walt had to ask Roy time and again for funds to accomplish the things he wanted to do. Roy was financially conservative, but Walt realized that you have to spend money to make money. Hard work, creativity and financial investment made Disney one of the biggest success stories of the twentieth century.
4. **Wasted money with no results.** This is especially true among small businesses. A sales rep calls a CEO or marketing person and offers him or her a deal on something that's *what they NEED* to get their name out there. Unfortunately, the business owner doesn't know what will or won't work, but the rep makes it all sound so good. And then a huge check is written. But results don't happen and the company owner writes off all marketing

because so much money was lost. Don't let this happen to you. Explore, consult, do whatever you have to do to better understand how, when and where to spend your marketing money.

5. **No strategy.** All successful marketing initiatives begin with a rock-solid plan that lists audiences, objectives, budget, and specific media or communication channels. Effective marketing depends on knowing all these things and how you're most likely to persuade your audience to respond in a favorable way—in other words, buying from you. You have a website. How are you going to attract visitors? You sell something. How will you get prospective customers to buy from you rather than from a competitor? What are the best ways to reach your customers—direct email, sales letters, remarketing based on web visits, PPC advertising, search engine marketing, a combination of the above, or something else?
6. **Not leveraging technology.** For the past quarter-century, technology has played a major role in marketing. We all use it as consumers and expect a better-than-satisfactory user experience when we visit websites, use social media or sign up to be on an email list. So it only makes sense that our businesses should be tech-savvy from a marketing standpoint. And there are so many tech tactics that have proven effective when used in strategic and creative ways. In 2010, I worked at a major museum that had no social media presence. So I launched one (three, actually) and used these platforms every day to connect and converse with customers. Our following grew by leaps and bounds, online conversations took place and these social platforms ultimately played a huge role in our marketing efforts.
7. **Don't do PR.** There are more media outlets now than ever before, and all of them are continually looking for content to provide to their audiences. In addition, to borrow a phrase often used by my friend, Paul Furiga, president of WordWrite PR, every company has a story to tell. Think about the interesting, important and even newsworthy things happening in your organization. If you're not sharing them with media outlets you're missing huge opportunities. Unlike advertising, which is pay to play, informational articles, stories and segments carry an inherent credibility because—well, if its published it must be true. And believe me, writers, editors and producers want to hear your interesting stories.
8. **Don't measure.** One of the great things about having a comprehensive strategy (#5) is the ability to measure and evaluate results on an ongoing basis and tweak as needed. In direct response marketing, we have a process called A/B testing, which involves sending two different sales letters to two different mailing or email lists of recipients. The one that brings the greater response becomes the letter that we try to improve upon to further elicit response in future mailings. This helps us make our sales appeals as effective as possible. With marketing efforts, you want to know what's working, what's

not working and what can be improved. Continual modifications can continually improve your sales and marketing efforts. Measurement is key. Fine-tune and make more sales.

9. **Me, me, me.** Take a look at the About Us page on your company website or the text in your company brochure. If you continually refer to what WE do, changes those wes to yous. Your customers visit your website and read your marketing literature to learn how you can help THEM, solve THEIR problems and address THEIR pain points. Marketing has always been about customer benefits, not facts or features. Literally everything you write should be done with the customers' needs or wants in mind. You sell Porsches? You're selling to customers who want to buy prestige, not a car (#2 above). Put the customer first in all your marketing efforts.

10. Listen to the wrong people. Ask anyone who wor

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