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15 crippling mistakes: Are you making them?

Posted on April 17th, 2015 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



I've identified 15 major marketing mistakes. Take this quiz to see whether these blunders are negatively affecting your brand. Circle all of the numbers below that describe or reflect your company's current marketing practices. 1. Not refreshed? When was the last time you refreshed the content on your website? Changed out the images? Made sure all of the information is accurate? Rule of thumb: Change content like you change underwear — frequently.

2. Not socially acceptable? Have a Facebook page, Twitter account or YouTube channel? Do your friends or followers believe you're missing in action? If you've established a footprint in the social community, be social. It's better to have no presence than one that is neglected.

3. Not listening? When did you last ask or survey your customers to understand how well your product, people or service was meeting their needs and expectations? If you've asked in the past year, bravo! Now what did you do with the feedback you received? Have you responded appropriately? More than ever, consumers want to engage with their brands of choice. They want to be heard and to have a meaningful dialogue. Do you enjoy two-way communication?

4. Not appreciative? Have you expressed sincere appreciation to your customers for their business? Do you thank them regularly and sincerely? Do you know them and greet them by name (where possible)? We all love to do business with companies and people who value us individually. Does your company exude a culture of appreciation?

5. Not reputation-savvy? Do you proactively monitor what your customers and prospects are saying about your company and brand? And do you have a strategy to solicit, collect and promote positive customer testimony? Every company must actively safeguard its brand assets by doggedly monitoring online chatter and commentary. The positive and negative posts and discussions will build upon — or break — your business. Knowing how to skillfully respond to a less-than-stellar allegation can help turn the tide. Online reputation management must be a top priority and an integral part of your daily marketing activity. Is it?

6. Not consistent? Is your brand position clear? Does your company speak with the same strong voice and consistent messaging throughout all of its marketing platforms? Or does it suffer from multiple personality disorder with a different look, feel and message at every turn? Each and every time you

promote your brand, it should serve to reinforce and strengthen your position, not create confusion.

7. Not measuring up? How well is your marketing and advertising activity actually performing? Do you regularly employ measurement tools and then analyze and report your results? Do you know what is working and what is not? To maximize the ROI (return on investment) of your marketing expenditures, you must regularly measure results and adjust your plan accordingly.

8. Not a planner? When was the last time your marketing team sat down together to establish clearly defined goals and objectives, then developed well-thought-out strategies and tactics to achieve them? Was it written and shared so that everyone who needs to know knows and is on the same page? I've often seen marketers employ what I call the "Quick Draw McGraw" syndrome: "Let's try this silver bullet and shoot it, and if that doesn't work, let's try another shot." No budget is big enough for such slipshod tactics. Although plans admittedly must be fluid these days, having clear direction is necessary for success. Do you have a plan? Does your team understand it? And are all of your marketing activities in alignment?

9. Not emotionally connected? As some of my favorite authors, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, wrote a long time ago, marketers must "put the ing in the thing." That profound insight is as relevant today as when it was first published and considered a breakthrough. We're not selling boats. We're selling boating. Although we'd all agree that each of our products needs its own unique and advantageous selling proposition (see No. 10), we mustn't forget to promote the lifestyle and what our product and/or service ultimately delivers. Never forget: No one needs a boat. We must reinforce to our prospects how and what boating delivers at a purely emotional level to overcome the objections of the rational mind.

10. Not distinctive? Although this may seem to contradict No. 9, it does not. Point No. 9 referenced the failure associated with focusing only on the parts and pieces vs. connecting at an emotional level. However, marketers absolutely must communicate those all-important unique selling propositions that deliver a better or improved experience for customers.

Here's what I mean. If you lined up a dozen 20-something-foot bowriders or center consoles of varying brands and stripped off the logos, would the average boat buyer be able to identify yours? (Although I'm talking boats, this argument applies to whatever it is you sell. If there are others who sell the same type of product or service in your niche, this important point applies.) What features about your company, your product or your service set it apart from the others and create the winning advantage and benefit for your customer?

Great branding and positive public relations will take your product (or service) just so far, but delivering authentic distinctions that separate your baby (or your company) from the pack is another challenge and opportunity altogether. So, do you offer any truly unique selling advantages? If you don't, it's time to break out of the me-too mentality before your product becomes obsolete. If you have unique selling propositions, have you successfully crafted and communicated that message so it resonates with your customers and prospects?

11. Not a turn-on. Sexist ads are offensive. Period. I'm not talking pretty girls in a swimsuit enjoying the boating lifestyle. Here's the line in the sand: If the lens is focused on the voluptuous or otherwise very obvious gratuitous physical attributes of the model and the image takes attention away from the product or service you're promoting, your brand will suffer from the unwanted exposure. Don't be a boob.

12. Not a welcoming wagon? We live in a multicultural world. Doesn't it make sense that our brand imagery should begin to reflect that beautiful diversity? Does yours? Manufacturers and dealers alike

should take active steps to positively portray and invite new markets to come boating with us. Although fully embracing new markets obviously goes much deeper than photography, it's a snapshot in the right direction.

13. Not relevant? What's happening in marketing? What are the latest trends and developments? When was the last time you read a top-selling marketing book, scoured the latest marketing white papers, reviewed or contributed to some lively marketing forums, sat in on a marketing webinar? Invested in your own marketing professional development and education?

Marketers operate today at warp speed. Marketing has evolved more in the past five years than in the 20 previous years combined. Those who are successfully navigating this labyrinth are on the pulse of marketing change. It's a daily exercise and a requirement. Yes, it's challenging. Some might suggest that it's overwhelming. However, if you're responsible for leading the marketing charge for your company — or are part of the team that does — you need to immerse yourself and sharpen your skill set to remain relevant.

14. Not afraid. What new marketing initiative have you tested in the past three months? Are you reaching outside the comfort zone and developing new strategies and tactics to achieve your goals? I'm not advocating sweeping changes to your marketing activities or huge hits to the budget, but I am suggesting trying something new on a regular basis. Don't be afraid to embrace new technology or tactics. Read up and reach out to others more experienced in your community who are willing to share.

15. Not passionate? You're reading this column because you obviously have an interest in marketing. But are you really passionate about it? Do you spend your waking hours on the job constantly seeking ways in which you can be a positive, contributing change agent for your company?

Whoever is responsible for your marketing should have bone-deep passion for your brand. Day in and day out, the marketing team should be contemplating how to improve while constantly considering and developing new ideas and concepts. Passion must be a dynamic part of the marketer's DNA. When the excitement and passion for marketing is lacking, the results often follow suit. My advice: If you've lost your steam, take time to rev up the engine and recharge. And if you find you can't restore the love, it's time to move out of the way and move on to new horizons.

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