

Reducing Your Company's Recession Risk

Avoiding Common Marketing Mistakes Can Help You Ride Out the Storm

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With the unpredictable stock market, rising oil and gas prices, and increased costs for business and consumer goods, most people are feeling stressed and looking for ways to reduce their expenses. If you want your product or service to remain a priority in the minds of your customers, now may be a good time to re-evaluate your marketing.

In a nutshell, marketing is the process of enhancing perception and creating desire in your customers. People form a perception of your business subliminally, and your brand is the result of the public's experiences with your company and its product or service. If their perception of your company is negative or indifferent, all the advertising and PR in the world won't change your brand unless you modify or alter your customers' experience.

Many businesses damage their own brands by making simple marketing mistakes that can be easily avoided. Here are some examples:

1. Misunderstanding Your Brand

Despite the fact that your brand consists completely of public perception, many business owners believe that their product or service will sell because they perceive it to be the best. The best way to effectively market your product is to understand why people buy it and what value they perceive in it. Once you know this, you can create messages that convey the benefits customers get rather than filling your space and time with what you have to offer. This simple change in your message can make a big difference.

2. Neglecting Brand Promises

Understanding why people

buy from you is an important step in securing your brand's value. For example, if you've earned the reputation of being a problem solver, and someone or something within your organization starts making it difficult for customers to do business with you, they will look for alternatives. You should thoroughly understand your brand promises and deliver a consistent experience within every customer touch point.

3. Not Knowing Your Customers

Please don't try to be everything to everyone. Your brand actually becomes stronger when you narrow your focus. Niche marketing involves determining who your customers are and understanding their common characteristics. Once you appreciate their demographics and psychographics, it becomes easier to craft messages that will appeal to them and capture their attention.

4. Forgetting to Focus on Customers' Needs

Arguably, the most common marketing mistake business owners make is not focusing their advertising on fulfilling customers' wants and needs. Many companies waste their ad space and time talking about attributes of their business that have no perceived value to customers. Things like quality and great service are expected in any company, so their mention is meaningless. Good ads instantly grab the attention of targeted customers by conveying the value of the product quickly and succinctly. Remember, it's not about what you have to offer, but about what your customers get. That's the best way to successfully convey a message that grabs attention.

5. Not Creating a Unique Selling Proposition

If you don't have a unique selling proposition, it is extremely difficult to set yourself apart and position your product or service as more desirable than your competitors'. Customers need a reason to choose you over your competition, so you should identify something that singles you out as unique. Determine the specifics of your product or service that are most appealing, what your customers get, and why you are uniquely qualified to fulfill their needs. Once you set yourself apart, you can convey that value to potential customers.

6. Inconsistency

Your logo is a symbol of your brand, and it should be respected. Inconsistent logo placement and size, random use of fonts and colors, and disjointed messages are unprofessional. Your customers may not necessarily be able to put their finger on why something makes them uncomfortable, but your brand is entirely about feelings, and you don't want to give people a reason to perceive you as inconsistent and, therefore, unstable.

7. Elevating Your Judgment over Your Customers' Judgment

Sometimes success breeds arrogance, and arrogance defeats good judgment. This may happen when successful business owners, believing that theirs is the most important opinion, neglect public perception. This dangerous trap often leads to destructive marketing decisions.

8. Neglecting Repeat Business and Referrals

It has been said that it costs

about five times as much to obtain a new customer as it does to sell additional products and services to an existing one. Your greatest professional asset is your customers, so do you have a plan in place to market to them? Do you consistently provide incentives for them to refer business to you?

9. Copying Your Competitors

Although it is important to remain aware of your competitors' marketing strategies and tactics, it is better to make judgments based upon your own solid positioning, unique selling proposition, and the perceived value of your product or service. The simple fact that somebody else is doing something doesn't necessarily make it a successful marketing tactic. They may be caught in a trap without fresh ideas, just spinning their wheels. Believe in your own concrete marketing plan and dare to be different. If your message is on target, you will reap the rewards.

10. Changing Your Advertising out of Boredom

You will likely tire of an advertising campaign before your customers do because you were involved throughout the conceptual and development phase, long before the public ever saw it. Track and regularly review your results in order to make an informed decision about when it's time to roll out new creative efforts.

When your current campaign is no longer producing the results that you expect, it is time to change your creative strategy. Boredom is not a good reason. However, it is good strategy to have something new waiting in the wings, so you don't have to suffer an extended period of

reduced profit while you develop your new advertising campaign.

11. Buying the Wrong Media

Misfired media buys are usually the result of one of two things: business owner ego or overzealous sales representatives. Utilizing incorrect media is often related to mistake number 3 above — not knowing your customers.

For example, if you own a small personal insurance agency with a few offices, it is probably not a good use of your money to buy non-targeted mass media. How likely is it that you will lure away enough customers from agencies in other communities to cover the expense of that broad message? Doesn't it make more sense to send a targeted message

to those people who have the most likely potential to become your customers?

12. Running 'Cool' Ads

Creativity can be both a blessing and a curse. Have you ever seen an ad and said to yourself, 'I don't get it'? Have you ever remembered the creative premise of an ad but couldn't remember the product or company it represented? Unfortunately, award-winning advertising doesn't necessarily work. Simplicity is usually best. Driving home the value of your product to your targeted customers is the most effective use of your money.

13. Neglecting Your Audio Message

These days, many people lis-

ten to television advertising more than watch it, especially within their local news. People listen to news while they get ready for work, make dinner, and prepare for bed. So if much of the audience doesn't have eyes on the screen when advertising runs, does your audio message deliver?

There is a simple test to see if you're guilty of neglecting your audio. Close your eyes and listen to your TV ad, putting yourself in the shoes of a person who is new to the market and unfamiliar with your company. Will this person quickly know what's in it for them and why they should buy it from you?

Sometimes TV ads rely on pleasant music beds and obscure messages. If you don't instantly convey something that listeners

value, it is nearly impossible to capture their attention.

In these times of tightening purse strings, it is smart business strategy to avoid anything that wastes money. If you always remember that your brand is built upon public perception, and you make smart marketing decisions, you will keep your company in a position to remain competitive, with a product or service that is perceived as valuable by your potential customers. ♦

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