

by Jay Conrad Levinson

The path to entrepreneurial success is mined with booby traps disguised as words of wisdom. Guerrillas can distinguish the facts from the fables.

There are many marketing myths that ought to be tucked away where you keep the collected works of the Brothers Grimm, Aesop and Mother Goose. They may be fun to read, but they are disastrous to any marketing campaign. Heaven help us, there are hundreds of these myths circulating, but we'll deal only with ten of them here because if I wrote about all of them, your computer would probably crash while laughing in disbelief.

Myth: It's good to have a lot of white space in advertisements, brochures, and other printed material.

Truth: Your prospects and customers care a whole lot more about information than blank space. They want to know what your offering can do for them, not that you can afford to run a lot of white space. Usually white space substitutes for powerful ideas, a list of benefits and a fertile imagination. Attention should be drawn by substance, not emptiness. Yes, white space is aesthetically pleasing, but profits are even more delightful.

Myth: Use short copy because people just won't read long copy.

Truth: People read long books, long articles and long letters. They read whatever interests them, and the more they're interested, the more they'll read. If you give people more data than they need, they'll either buy from you or they won't buy. If you give them less, they won't buy -- period. Studies show that readership of marketing materials falls off dramatically after the first 50 words, but stays high from 50 words to 500 words. That means your non-prospects will turn the page in a hurry, but your prospects will read hang on to every word, trying to learn as much as they can.

Myth: It is costly to purchase television time.

Truth: This myth was once the truth, but cable and satellite TV have obliterated it. The cost to run a prime time commercial in any major market in the U.S. is now \$20 or less, often as low as \$5. Better still, cable TV allows you to cherry-pick where your commercials will run so that they air only in communities where your prospects live. You can advertise on CNN, MTV, ESPN, A?, The Discovery Channel -- any satellite-delivered programming. And cable companies will produce your spot for a cost near \$1000, a far cry from the \$197,000 average spent on production in 1996.

Myth: Sell the sizzle, not the steak.

Truth: The idea is to sell the solution, not the sizzle. The easiest way to sell anything is to position it as the solution to a problem. If you look for the sizzle and not the problem, you're looking in the wrong direction. Your prospects might appreciate the sizzle, but they'll write a check for the solution. Your job is to spot the problem then offer your product or service as the solution. If you think solutions, you'll market solutions. If you think sizzle, you'll sell sizzle. You'll find that the path of least resistance to the sale leads right through the problem to the solution.

Myth: Truly great marketing works instantly.

Truth: First-rate sales work instantly. Great limited-time offers work instantly. But great marketing is not made up of sales and limited-time offers alone. These will attract customers, but they won't be loyal and they'll be won by whoever offers the lowest price. Great marketing is made up of creating a desire for your offering in the minds of qualified prospects, then peppering your offers with sales and limited-time offers. But a program of fast-buck marketing usually leads to oblivion. The best marketing in America took a long time to establish itself. Just ask the Marlboro man. Or the Green Giant. Or that lonely Maytag repairman. None of that marketing worked instantly, but it has worked for decades and still does.

Myth: Marketing should entertain and amuse.

Truth: Show business should entertain and amuse. But marketing should sell your offering. This widespread myth is based upon studies that show people like marketing that entertains. They like it but they sure don't respond to it. Alas, the marketing community nurtures this myth by presenting awards based upon glitz and glitter, humor and originality, special effects and killer jingles. Those awards should be given for profit increases and nothing else. The only thing that should glitter should be your bottom line.

Myth: Marketing should be change regularly to keep it fresh and new.

Truth: The longer that solid marketing promotes a product or service, the better. Guerrillas create marketing plans that can guide their efforts for five or ten years, even longer. How long have people been in good hands with Allstate? How long have Rice Krispies snapped, crackled and popped? Do you think these marketers would be more successful if they kept changing the marketing around to keep it fresh? I think not.

Myth: Marketing is successful if it is memorable.

Truth: Marketing is successful if it moves your product or service at a profit. Memorability has nothing to do with it. Whether people like it or not has nothing to do with it. Studies continue to prove that there is no relationship between remembering your marketing and buying your offering. All that matters is if people are motivated to make a purchase. So don't aim for memorability as much as desirability because that leads to profitability.

Myth: Bad publicity is better than no publicity at all.

Truth: Bad publicity is bad for your business. No publicity is a lot healthier for you. People just love to gossip, especially about businesses that have done something so awful that the media exposes it. Guerrillas love publicity but avoid bad publicity because they know it spreads faster than wildfire.

Myth: All that really counts is earning a honest profit.

Truth: Good taste and sensitivity also count. Marketing, as part of mass communications, is part of the evolutionary process. It educates, informs, announces, enlightens and influences human behavior. Because it does, it has an obligation to offend nobody, to present its material with taste and decency, to be honest and to benefit customers. If it does that and earns profits too, it is true guerrilla marketing.