

by Jay Conrad Levinson

You know exactly what your company is, what it stands for, what it offers to its target audience and what it hopes to accomplish. But is that really your company?

Not really. In reality, your company is the marketing that people see. It's the big things such as your website and your features and benefits, but it's also a combination of seemingly minor details -- all anything but minor. Your company is the way your telephone is answered. It's the way you listen to customers and prospects. It's your ability to render superlative service. It's every letter you send, every phone call you make, every person you employ.

There is an enormous difference between reality and perception. You know in your heart the reality of your company, but chances are that your prospects and customers perceive you not by that reality but by the attitude and professionalism of your marketing. Their perception of your company counts for every bit as much as the reality of your company.

Your company is your involvement with the community, your willingness to provide speed and convenience in all your transactions. It's the regularity of your follow-up, the experience of other customers you've had, even the way you greet your prospects and customers.

One of your primary jobs is to make certain that the perception of your company matches the reality. You've got to realize that your long-time customers may know exactly what your company is all about, but your prospects only know you by your marketing -- or lack of it.

Your website, along with your other marketing, must convey your company identity because more and more people every day will be learning of your company online and not offline. To them, you are your website.

Your ability to tailor your offerings and service to the needs of your customers is your company. The quality of information you provide and the generosity with which you provide it -- those also are your company.

Your newsletter and brochures, your fliers and promotions -- they are your company. Today, more than ever, you can craft your marketing to reflect exactly what your company is. You can use your computer and a wide array of software to create dynamic marketing materials that communicate your company is professional, caring, unique, and covers all the bases. You can use customer questionnaires to learn about your customers so that you get a good bead on their perceptions of you, both good and bad. The information they provide shines a beacon on their opinions of you, allowing you to make the necessary changes to match their perceptions with the perceptions you want them to have.

Your company is the sum total of what it truly is -- combined with the marketing you put out to the world -- or the marketing you do not practice. That's why active and aggressive marketing is the hallmark of successful companies. That's why they measure their marketing to be certain it

is hitting home and communicating the actuality of their firms.

Most owners of small businesses focus upon their company far more than they focus upon their marketing. The two should be inseparable. And the vast majority of the world who are not yet your customers know you only by your marketing. If it comes up short or isn't noticed by them, it makes no difference how superlative your quality and dedication may be.

Never forget that one of the tiniest groups of people on the planet are your customers. They know your company by what it really is. But the billions of people who have never purchased from you -- they know your company only by your marketing efforts.

Guerrilla marketers pay as much close attention to their marketing as they do to their business. They do not delude themselves into thinking everybody knows about their excellence. Instead, they put out the word and continue spreading it, making certain that it accurately reflects their company. We've all had experiences when we were shocked to learn that a company was drastically different from its marketing. Never let that happen to your company. It never will when you always remember that your company is two things at all times: what it really is and what people think it is based upon your marketing.