



Five Deadly Sins of Spray and Pray Marketing

Marketing is probably the most important skill that a business must master, next to planning and budgeting. Unless people know about you, your firm, your products or services, even the best plans will fail. The 21st-century marketplace is a far different place than the mid-20th century. These changes have created what I call a lot of “spray and pray” marketers.

Before we can explore the deadly sins of spray and pray marketing, we should come to some shared understandings of this essential business skill, beginning with a definition. Marketing comes from the Latin origins of “mercatus,” which means trade. Today, marketing has expanded beyond just trading, but is really about broadcasting your trading message. After working with numerous businesses, I have come to define marketing as:

Marketing is both a strategy (thought) and a tactic (action) to create consistent, constant awareness and promotion of your products and services, with the desired result of potential buyers (also known as prospects):

- To consider your products and services
- To become clients or customers
- To make referrals to others

Next, why is marketing necessary and important? Without effective marketing, your business will fail. This is the necessity of marketing. Failure rates for small businesses range from 50 percent to 90 percent for the first year, depending upon numerous factors including industry, marketplace and owner’s competency. For those that survive the first year, by the fifth year another 50 percent of those will no longer be in business. Research collected by U.S. Small Business Association suggests that only one-third of all start-up businesses will last as long as four years.

Beyond the obviousness of avoiding business failure, marketing is an important partner to the stages of growth within your business. Among the hundreds of expert business coaches, consultants, gurus and writers, consensus generally accepts three stages of growth for most businesses:

- Creation
- Growth
- Maturity

After a business matures, the next stage actually splits into two. The most common split is a decline in business, because the leadership failed to keep ahead of the current market trends. Split two is about reinvention through transformation, which is best described in the book *Blue Ocean Strategy*. Understanding what stage your business is in will help you determine your marketing message within your marketing plan.

So what is your marketing plan? When you have an executable strategic plan, you will also have an executable marketing plan. If you don’t, you are probably simply spraying and praying. What this means is that you spray your marketing efforts all over the place, and pray that they stick.

A spray and pray marketing “plan” (and I use the word plan very loosely) drains your limited resources of time, energy and dollars while increasing your stress work levels. Truly, this is not what you want. Here are some of the deadly sins of spray and pray marketers and some helpful tips in how to avoid committing them.

Sin #1 – No strategic plan

The failure to strategically plan is the number-one sin and cascades down into other tactics, including both the marketing and sales plans. Without a unified plan, there is no alignment between marketing strategic and tactics.

Sin #2 – Not researching target market “psychographics” for the 21st century

To avoid the spray and pray, begins by understanding your market and identifying your targets within that market. Many in business recognize target market demographics, but fail to include the psychographics or the “whys” driving the decision-making process, such as habits, beliefs or desires.

For example, media research revealed that people spent seven fewer minutes reading during the first quarter of 2006 than they did just two years earlier. As a business owner knowing this habit, I would then direct my marketing dollars to those printed professional journals or business magazines where the content is compelling, relatively short, and is within my target market.

Sin #3 – Not understanding the difference between impressions and direct contacts

Television, radio and billboards base their numbers on impressions such as 20 million people or households tuned into XYZ television event. You buy the idea that your marketing message was potentially exposed to 20 million people. However, the real truth is that you don’t know how many of your target market actually saw it. By using direct mail from postcards, email newsletters, paid subscriptions, you can actually make direct contacts, because the marketing effort is targeted specifically to your prospects.

Sin #4 – Not tracking results of marketing efforts

Small business owners, in their quest for more business, try a lot of different marketing vehicles, from attending networking events to purchasing advertising space. However, most of these same business owners commit the sin of not tracking the results from these marketing activities. One of the best ways to overcome this sin is to ask every prospect this simple question: “How did you hear about us?”

Also, some businesses that say they track results will discontinue a direct mail campaign because the 100 mailed postcards delivered

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no results. Unfortunately, to show results requires a 1,000-piece mailing unless the mailing is to very, very specific businesses. Some other businesses will abandon all marketing efforts (which probably have been limited) when sales start lagging. This is the exact time to kick off an effective marketing campaign.

Another example of not tracking marketing efforts is the annual expenditures by businesses of thousands of dollars by attending and belonging to at least one chamber of commerce, two trade associations, one formal networking group and one professional development association. Yet, most of these same businesses cannot tell you their client acquisition costs. What happens is that additional dollars are spent in activities that potentially deliver little to no measurable results.

Sin #5 – Contracting a marketing firm with less scrutiny than hiring employees

The first four sins lead to the fifth sin of hiring a marketing firm without asking the necessary questions to ensure that the firm is a good fit. These questions would include:

- What are the marketing results from similar companies?
- What type of marketing vehicle do you feel is the most effective?
- Would your current or past clients be willing to directly share their experiences?
- What is the estimated time frame for your marketing solutions?

Hiring an effective marketing company can increase your market share and increase your bottom line. However, since marketing is essentially about trading, then doesn't it make sense to ensure that you receive the greatest value for your trade?

If you are a spray and pray marketer, now is the time to take action and to accept that hope is not an effective strategy to grow your business and your bottom line. **N**

Are you facing lagging sales to can't-do attitudes? If you could overcome these repetitive challenges, what would that mean for you? Leanne works with the human capital to develop results-driven leadership in people, teams and organizations for sustainable performance improvement. Visit www.processspecialist.com or email leanne@processspecialist.com.