

## Nine Mistakes That Doom a Company's Marketing

By  
John Graham

Marketing has never been a laidback, trouble-free game anyone can play. Today, it's far more perilous than ever, particularly since prospective customers are moving targets. Just when you think you have them figured out, they've moved on. If you don't know what they want and the way they want to get it, they're gone. If you disappoint them by betraying their trust, they'll strike back. Bank on it.

Today's customers are touchy and unforgiving. They're in charge and they know it. While marketing can play a key role in a company's success, it's a fragile function; its efforts can easily be undermined and rendered ineffective.

Here are nine common mistakes that will doom a company's marketing:

### **Mistake #1. The boss as Marketer-in-Chief**

While there may be a marketing director or even a CMO, in many companies it's the boss who calls the shots as to what works and what doesn't. Although the boss may be knowledgeable in many areas, more often than not marketing isn't one of them. Those working in marketing get the message: either go along or go.

### **Mistake #2. Lack of budget responsibility**

"Just let us know what you need and we'll do it." Even though the words sound helpful and supportive, control of the budget controls marketing. It makes a consistent and integrated marketing plan irrelevant, along with turning marketers into beggars. Marketing initiatives are designed so they get approved rather than meet verifiable objectives.

### **Mistake #3. Always doing the same thing**

This is the "well-oiled" approach to marketing. Since everything is working smoothly, why make changes? It's not only an appealing mistake, it's also dangerous. Since conditions are always changing marketing should be responding with more appropriate customer-centric responses.

Like others, marketers do their best work when they challenge their own performance, identify missed opportunities, make data-driven decisions, and get feedback from others in the company.

#### **Mistake #4. Failing to deal with unrealistic expectations**

It's common for marketers to be faced with unworkable expectations, particularly when it comes to time and cost considerations for marketing initiatives. It's the old champagne taste on a beer budget.

Without a clear agreement of expectations, marketers find themselves in the unenviable position of having to say, "But, I thought you meant..." or "We don't have the budget to do that."

#### **Mistake #5. Not exploiting brand value**

Countless marketing messages shout self-serving messages in the hope that something will stick: "We're the oldest...", "You can't do better anywhere else," "We love our customers...", and more.

Marketing's job is creating customers who decide it's in their best interest to do business with a brand. Self-serving messaging begs the question: What do you offer that aligns with their lifestyle, values, aspirations, or needs? In other words, taking advantage of your brand's value.

#### **Mistake #6. Dropping marketing initiatives too soon**

There's always pressure to try something new and different. While there can be good reasons for making changes, a strong case can be made for not quitting too soon. Messages sink in slowly and action occurs when there's a felt need.

For example, the hazelnut cocoa spread Nutella has a year-long campaign to own weekend breakfasts that includes TV spots and social media. It offers rewards to consumers who report on their weekend breakfasts.

#### **Mistake #7. Not engaging individual customers**

"If you can't give me exactly what I want, you don't know me so I'm gone." This stark message tells the story. Fortunately, the expertise, data, techniques, and channels are available to meet the challenge for engaging individuals. As one restaurant chain puts it, "You can't fake steak."

#### **Mistake #8. Permitting constant interruptions**

Uber's CEO recently said the company's 1,200-member marketing team was "bloated" and promptly fired 400 of them. Far from being overstaffed, most marketing teams are spread too thin. If that isn't enough, they face a steady stream of interruptions. "Give it to marketing, they'll take care of it."

Marketers are good at solving problems, which is why companies turn to them when needs arise. Yet, if they are expected to do their best work, there comes a time to say no.

**Mistake #9. Not having enough time**

Marketing is all about creativity and that takes time. It can't be forced like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube.

Teresa Amabile, a retired Harvard Business School researcher, along with others, studied the conditions for creativity and found that their subjects were most creative “under low to moderate pressure.” When under more intense pressure, they still felt creative, but, as she says, “What they tended to get done was not their most important work. They tended to get done a lot of stuff that came flying to them, crises that arose, that kind of thing.”

We kid ourselves if we think we do our best work under pressure. Things take time and creativity is one of them.

There they are, nine mistakes that undermine marketing. While there others, these will get the job done.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of “Magnet Marketing,” and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, “No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas.” Contact him at [jgraham@grahamcomm.com](mailto:jgraham@grahamcomm.com) or [johnrgraham.com](http://johnrgraham.com).