

# Why Companies Can't Get Marketing Right

By  
John Graham

Marketing rarely fails because of a lack of interest, ideas, or even adequate resources. However, it always fails when it doesn't turn prospective buyers into believers.

Marketing derails when it's little more than a series of loosely strung together and uncoordinated "tactics"— email campaigns, promotions, presentations, blogs, social media engagements, charitable support, newsletters, collateral pieces, webinars, events, and all the other stuff intended to "get the message out."

While this is a high activity picture, it's also a fruitless one. It helps explain why marketing budgets are cut and market managers last a year or two and move on. Then, the story is repeated, once again.

There's another way to look at marketing: *helping customers enhance their lives and fulfill their aspirations*. When someone makes a purchase, large or small, it's as if they're saying, "I believe." Far more than spending money, they are putting their trust in a business or a brand.

## **Making marketing work**

So, what will make marketing work? What should a company do to get it's marketing on the right track and keep it there? The answer is in asking the right questions:

### **#1. What's your message?**

Or, do you have one that everyone in the company can verbalize if asked? Most importantly, could your customers express it? Like so many other companies, you may be letting others define your message. If so, it's time to take charge. That begins with asking questions and gathering information. Here are a few starters:

- Why should anyone want to do business with you?
- What sets your company apart from the competition, if anything?
- What are your customers' complaints? What do they like about you?

How do you know what your customers think about you? *Ask them*. Get on the phone, use surveys, or, better yet, go see some of them. That's right, *in person*. They'll get excited to see *you*, instead of an invoice.

By now, you may have figured it out. *Marketing has nothing to do with your company or what it sells. Marketing is 100% about what customers want and what's in it for them.* To put it bluntly: if you talk about your company, visitors will run. Why? They care about themselves. We can learn from companies with a customer-focused message:

- Walmart. *Save money. Live better.*
- Toyota. *Let's go places.*
- Burger King. *Made to order.*
- Coca-Cola. *Taste the feeling.*
- Capital One. *What's in your wallet?*

Now, take it a step further. Focus on what's important to your customers, such as responsiveness, transparency, ease of access, keeping promises, helpfulness, and caring.

Next, come up with four or five *customer-focused messages*. Then, survey your customers and prospects, asking them to select the message that best represents your company. Along with obtaining valuable information, you are letting them know you care.

## **#2. What's your strategy?**

Then, with a compelling marketing message, the next task is deciding how to deliver it to customers and prospects. In other words, how do you go about pulling them closer, so they want to do business with you?

Here are possible components of a marketing plan. Each one should have its own strategy and customer-focused content:

- *Social marketing.* Choose and nurture the social platforms that work best for your business. Don't dilute your efforts by trying to be everywhere. Explore Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, and Yelp.
- *eNewsletters.* Capture interest by sharing your knowledge and experience, as well as customer testimonials, along with periodic helpful alerts.
- *Events, webinars, and podcasts.* Make sure the content is always customer-focused.
- *Group presentations.* Identify and contact relevant groups, along with asking customers for suggestions.
- *Charitable support.* Partner with a charity where you can leverage your company's capabilities and make it your corporate mission.
- *Advertising.* Both online and print ads do well if your choices are well researched. Consider Facebook advertising.

- *Website.* Think of your website as a resource for attracting customers. Focus the content on what interests them, what they want to learn not what you want to sell.
- *Bylined articles.* Demonstrate your competence with both short pieces and longer articles. Post on LinkedIn, and send to trade and general online and print publications.
- *Videos.* 45 to 90 seconds. Demonstrations, customer testimonials, but no talking heads.

If you think such a list is daunting, you're right. So, first, tackle those tactics that are most critical. Then, set realistic deadlines for implementing new initiatives, but always think excellence.

### **#3. How can you keep your marketing on track?**

Watch out! Marketing tactics often begin with enthusiasm but quickly fade away. This happens when the purpose isn't clear. Keep asking, "Why are we doing this?" and "Is it helping us pull customers and prospects closer?" If, the answer is no, evaluate and make changes. More than anything this is what helps keeps marketing on track.

But there's one more thing, as they say: *The effects of marketing are cumulative, not instantaneous.* Sure, early adopters are quick to jump aboard, but it takes more time for others. They want to be sure before they buy and that doesn't happen quickly. Unfortunately, too many marketers fall into the trap of quitting too soon. *What's important is being there when customers are ready to buy.*

Even so, competitors are always ready to strike, and that's why consistency is marketing's "secret juice" that goes a long way in bulletproofing customers. When customers know why they are doing business with you, they stay with you, and they are also more likely to make referrals.

There's no magic to marketing, and there are no gimmicks. Marketing delivers the right results when it pulls customers closer and closer so you can understand them and they can appreciate why doing business with you makes good sense—their way of saying, "I believe."

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), 617-774-9759 or [johnrgraham.com](http://johnrgraham.com).