



Does *anyone* know how to Market? (and will anyone care?)

by Chris Houchens

The garbage can is your friend.

Go to your bookshelf.

Find all the marketing business books you can.

Throw them out.

Rinse.

Repeat.

How do you pick the ones to throw out?

It depends.

The best litmus test is if “the company” bought everyone in the office a copy and made them read it. Bonus trash points are awarded if it was given out at a company retreat. It’s landfill fodder if it’s been featured in any business publication as the “next hot trend.” Go beyond the trash and actually burn any books that are condescending by insinuating that you are an idiot, dummy, or moron (unless you think you are, of course).

But don’t get me wrong.

Books are great. Knowledge is power. One of the best sources of knowledge comes from the written word whether that be from the old-fashioned printed kind or from the new publishing power of the web.

But, you can immediately see the trouble with these business books when you ask yourself one simple question:

How does the person who wrote this know the unique challenges and problems facing MY business?

After all, thousands of copies have been printed or millions of people are reading it online. How can it offer any unique solutions to unique problems? It can't. Although these authors do the best they can by presenting case studies and offering thoughts and tutorials on the way things are supposed to work, they will never offer personalized help through the mass publication of their work.

We all know that the perfect case study and the way things are supposed to work just don't happen for the most part in the real world. Here's what is happening: Today's business leaders are trying to make these textbook examples fit into the irregular holes of everyday marketing.

Why? Maybe they don't know any better. After all, not many executives have spent any time in the marketing trenches. They learned their marketing knowledge while getting a MBA that was just chockful of textbook examples. Some executives have served in the trenches, but have lost the feel for the market since ascending to management.

But there they are. Driving the car with no license. And no one in the car has the power to stop them.

And it's the same way (or worse) with smaller companies and solo shops. The owner feels they must make all the important marketing decisions even if they have no knowledge of what they're doing.

What to do?

LEARN TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE AND GET A GUIDE TO HELP

Since you threw away all those books, you probably are longing for a good business fable/analogy.

Here we go:

Bob and Susan have been saving up for many years to take an exotic leisure trip to the mysterious country of Marketvania. They have both heard that Marketvania has many cultural, historical, and natural destinations that everyone should visit. Bob and Susan want to make sure they get the full experience of the country and get the most value for their money.

A problem is that neither Bob or Susan speak Marketese or know anything about the country except what they've heard from their friends.

Susan's friend Madison A. said they just loved the Advertising Waterfalls in the northeast part of the country and when they go back, they'll spend all their time and money there. Bob's fishing buddy, Googie said that he loved Online Beach and that everyone should just stay there. And on and on it went. Whenever Bob and Susan would ask what part of Marketvania they should see, everyone became an "expert" and told them to spend all their time and money in one part of the country.

One day, Susan was in a bookstore and found a book called "Marketvania for Nincompoops". She bought it. After she and Bob read it, they were even more confused. The book just skimmed the surface of many of the great highlights of Marketvania, but it never discussed how to make all the destinations work on the same trip.

One night Bob was at the office working late when Mr. Bigguy walked by and asked how the vacation plans for Marketvania were coming. Bob said that he and Susan had no clue what to see or how to spend their time there. Mr. Bigguy said he went to Marketvania a lot and he found out a long time ago that there were two things you just had to do to get everything you could out of a trip to Marketvania. He learned how to speak Marketese and he always hired a good guide.

Bob wondered why he did both. Wouldn't one or the other suffice? Mr. Bigguy said you could muddle through with one. But the experience would be much better with both. If you just learn to speak the language, you miss many of things that are off the beaten path and worth exploring that a guide can show you. If you just get the guide, it's hard to tell him exactly what your needs are, what parts you want to see, and the results you'd like to get from the trip.

Bob was overjoyed and ran home to tell Susan the wonderful news...yada...yada...yada.

Sorry, I was getting a little queasy with the analogy.

You see the lesson here.

Good marketing does not come from a book. Good marketing does not come from what someone with a biased opinion tells you. Good marketing does not come from you picking up quick knowledge about marketing.

GOOD MARKETING COMES FROM YOU.

You are in charge of your business but that does not mean you are an expert in every aspect of it. Learn the basics in order to communicate to a professional what you'd like to get out of your marketing.

Be careful in picking your professional. Many of them already have the path laid out without any input from you. A good marketing consultant or ad agency will listen first and then offer suggestions based upon your needs.

Will anyone care?

Once you have your path laid out. The real work begins.

You must learn to rise above the marketing clutter that everyone else is creating by following the books. Luckily, because they are all working out of the same playbook, they are all very similar so it's easy to stand out. Unfortunately, the other marketers are trying to grab everyone's attention with a broad and loud message. The market is fed up and has stopped listening.

Write the following sentence down and look at it when you're creating your marketing.

NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOUR MARKETING.

That's right. No one cares. People care about what can make their life better or easier. The only people who love advertising are people who work in ad agencies. Everyone else is tired of getting yelled at to buy this or try that. They've tuned out your marketing.

The secret of marketing is to get them tuned back in.

How do you do that?

Well, it's not by creating a huge ad campaign and buying up full-page newspaper ads, network TV time, and billboards from here to Timbuktu. Remember everyone has those tuned out.

Your marketing works not by telling everyone that your product is great. Your marketing works when you have one person believe that your product is great. This is hard to do and it certainly won't get done with a national TV buy.

Luckily, some people have caught onto this truth. Instead of **BROAD**casting to consumers, they are **NARROW**casting. Firms now exist to create word-of-mouth for your company just by using your product on the streets. Online marketing can now zero in on specific online users. Direct mail companies can tell you more than you want to know about the people not just living in a certain zip code, but individual streets in that zip code. And on it goes.

As Steve Martin once said, "Let's all get SMALL." Stop thinking big and think about your customers on a one-on-one basis. When you think of companies that you personally buy from, it's not the huge mega companies that treat you like a number that you are impressed with. It's the small shops that know your name and treat you like a valued customer. In the end, that's what makes marketing work. You have to think about your customers as people and not as costs per impression on an ad spreadsheet.

Don't get me wrong. It's more work to do it this way. But, it's so much more effective. Are you ready?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Houchens is the owner and principal of [Shotgun Concepts](#), a firm he founded in 1997 to help businesses get the most out of their marketing, advertising, and PR efforts. He has spent several years working in advertising and marketing, most notably in the broadcasting and healthcare fields. A full bio can be found at <http://www.shotgunconcepts.com>

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Full screen/Normal screen view	[CTL] [L]	[⌘] [L]

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