

Marketing's Ten Commandments*

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In this the Information Age, it's easy for even smart marketers to lose sight of the basic principles that guide every successful marketing effort. As you contemplate new mediums and methods for promoting your company's products and services, recall the infinite wisdom of Marketing's Ten Commandments.

1. Honor thy customers.

Your current customers are your company's best prospects for future business. Market to them. Think of them as members of an exclusive club you started. Offer special incentives, a referral program, anything that shows your company's appreciation for their business in a sincere way. Turn the phrase, "The customer is always right." into "Always treat the customer right." You'll be amazed at the difference.

2. Don't take the names of thy customers and prospects in vain. As the corner grocer knew his patrons' tastes by heart, today's companies can accomplish the same thing on a much larger scale. With database marketing, you can cater your message to thousands of customers and prospects. Never forget customers and prospects also have addresses, phone numbers, tastes, wishes and kids with birthdays.

3. Remember to keep holy the accountability. For every marketing effort, you should expect something in return. Increased awareness. A boost in sales or leads. Test and compare the results with your objective. If you failed, at least you won't keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

4. Observe the laws of human nature. Selling Novas in Mexico. New Coke. Mammograms for Valentine's Day. The best marketing campaign in the world can't help a bad idea succeed. Whatever it is, it must ring true with your targeted market.

5. Thou shall not kill innovative marketing solutions. The average consumer is bombarded with over 2,000 advertising messages per day. To get through, you have to stand out from the pack. Look for opportunities to be creative with your media and message. You're paying for it. Why not make it memorable?

6. Thou shall not commit the cardinal sin--lack of planning. Don't look to marketing for the quick fix. Develop a short and long-term strategic marketing plan for your company, products and services. Then stick with it. The big payoff--sustained growth--takes time.

7. Thou shall not steal dollars from marketing. The marketing budget is among the first to get the ax when business takes a nose-dive. In reality, you should do the exact opposite. If the competition is killing you, find out why. Seek out a solution. Then focus on getting the word out.

The right marketing can turn things around in a hurry.

8. Thou shall not covet thy competitors' advertising. Imitation may well be the sincerest form of flattery. But advertising that looks the same and sounds the same as your competitors' does nothing to differentiate your company. Look to your potential customers for a unique marketing advantage, even if you're promoting a parity product.

9. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy competitor. Unless, of course, it's true. If you can claim product superiority over a competitor, don't shy away from it. It's a powerful message. Just make sure you can back it up. For example, Volvo showed a monster truck going over the tops of its cars without crushing the hoods. Competitors balked, saying it couldn't be done. As it turned out, Volvo had reinforced the cars prior to the demonstration.

10. Don't adulterate thy advertising with irrelevance and verbosity. Don't you just hate people who only talk about themselves? But isn't that what 90% of the advertising out there is all about? Like a super salesperson, great marketing develops a rapport, catalogs customer needs and creates a solution tailored to the individual. Not to mention avoids the natural tendency to be long-winded. If you must expound, do it with benefits, not features.

Regardless of tastes and trends, what ultimately determines marketing success will forever stay the same. The guiding principles in Marketing's Ten Commandments. Apply them in the ways of the day and you'll do to the competition what Moses did to the Red Sea.