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Navigating the Marketing Minefield Issue #22 March 2004

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Welcome to the latest edition of "Navigating the Marketing Minefield" a monthly newsletter for business people who find branding, marketing, advertising, promotions to be a bit like wading through a swamp with leaky gumboots...

You never know how wet your feet will end up.

Preconceived Ideas = Expectations Met (or Not?)

Think about the last time you had an expectation of something, based on what you had previously heard or seen, but not experienced yourself. Did the reality of your own experience meet, exceed or not even come close to your preconceived ideas about it beforehand?

Often we rely on others to tell us what to expect and that tends to bias our own thinking. For example today I had to enter the USA, via Los Angeles airport, and I have to say it was a delightful experience as far as typical customs, immigration and baggage collection goes. In fact, it was so smooth and uneventful I think I'll do it again someday. But as I wait for my connecting flight, I recall thinking before I got here that it was likely to be a very different experience, and fully expected to be hours clearing all the usual check points.

The reason for this having exceeded my expectations by such a wide margin on the positive side, was simply because only a week ago, a friend had also come here and I heard from his partner that he had found it to be a whole new lesson in patience as he had to wait hours for everything to happen and felt like he'd spent nearly a whole day in countless queues. Add to that report and the fact that a bomb blast in Madrid had earlier that day putting the world on high terrorist alert, I was sure it was likely to be even worse when I arrived.

But it wasn't. And I enjoyed that fact so much that I'm likely to tell quite a few people about it. My point is, that when we are marketing our businesses, we are planting seeds with our target market that will help them to form conclusions and have ideas about us long before they necessarily get to find out the facts for themselves. Haven't you avoided going to one place or another because of

someone else's report on the service or quality found there?

Investing in your reputation is critical for your business success. Without having a good customer service plan, you have no way of heading off the bad rumours that someone may start if something goes wrong one day. In fact, it's not a matter of if, but when that happens.

Let's face it, even the best of the best have the occasional messy mix ups. The difference is that they have already decided well ahead of times, what their rules are for fixing the problems when they occur so that both the big and the small problems are manageable and the customer is kept informed, happy and all is resolvable. It's about keeping the customer as a raving fan even when 'stuff' happens.

That takes a firm customer focus policy and regular reviews of where you stand in reality against your objectives in this area. First you must ensure that you know and chart what sort of reputation you want to have. Then, you must set rules in place that make working towards that reputation achievable. Finally, empower your employees to strive towards achieving this outcome by making it easy for them to understand and communicate your objectives with your customers.

How do you do this?

1. Set the ground rules for service and quality of your products.
2. Set the boundaries for what your staff can do to resolve anything up to what ever level you feel is appropriate for your business without you having to be the person called on to sort out every problem.
3. Have a follow up plan to contact customers who have been upset, irritated or worse.
4. Incorporate your reputation plans into the communication aspects of your marketing plan.
5. Check all parts of this plan regularly with both your employees and your customers.

Finally, remember that when you lose one customer, you most likely lose many more from what they may say about you, but that this also works in reverse. Happy customers can easily turn into raving fans who tell everyone about the great service that you give.

I presented a workshop to a number of people attending a conference last week and the theme was 'helping your customers to use your expertise'. When I had finished delivering my apparent words of wisdom, many people came up to me and asked me about how they could actually consider themselves to be experts in an industry that was so full of so many different levels of expertise, and in a wide range of specialty areas.

This is a common question, and my best answer is simply to first decide to be an expert in something that you are passionate about, then to keep extending your knowledge in that one area so that your expertise becomes indisputable. It really can be that simple. Some say that if you read 5 books on one subject, that you probably know enough to write a short booklet of your own about that same subject. If you know that much then you can most likely also teach someone else about the subject too. That in turn increases your own value to your customers, and extends your in-depth knowledge on the matter. If you keep learning and distributing your particular knowledge then in turn, your profile as an expert can keep on growing too.

Your profile as an expert puts up the value of the service and recommendations you give to your clients, and can easily put you way ahead of your competition. Think about the last time you got great ideas from someone you perceived to be top of their field... what was it that determined for you how much value that person brought to the discussion. Years of experience, write ups in journals and newspapers, or how much he or she had to say about something.

Invest in gathering some extra knowledge and then put it into some form of easily identified package of value to your clients and see how much of a difference that makes to your bottom line over the next year. I bet your margins go up.

Thanks for the great feedback we keep getting for our newsletter – its fun writing something that you obviously enjoy and keep getting a lot out of. We encourage you to forward and share this with any of your colleagues and clients.

Links we know you will find useful:

www.Herbusinesswaikato.co.nz For all women in business who want to network

www.my-biz-plan.com for information on our upcoming business and marketing planning software soon to be released – sign up now for more information on this and get a free download of the Media Plan toolkit – we know you'll love it

www.compassnz.com for all information about our coaching, consulting and web solutions services. Also, you'll find other information here about booking Maria to speak at your next conference, and upcoming books and resources we have available to help your business to grow forward.

www.thepowerofpromotionalproducts.com for information about Maria's great book that is getting great reviews for small business owners – highly recommended reading for all business owners – and is currently the best selling book available on how promotional products fit as part of the overall marketing mix....

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