



How to Avoid the 3 Big Marketing Mistakes

by Mary Schmidt

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There are probably as many mistakes in marketing as there are definitions of it. Three of the biggest mistakes I've seen in the past 20 years— in all sizes and types of companies— are the vision, the mission and the marketing strategy.

Yes, you need a vision, a mission and a strategy— but you shouldn't let the means become the end. If you need help with planning structure, sifting through market data or taking an objective look at your capabilities, bring in someone to help. But don't get sucked into spending months learning some academic process or entering data into massive spreadsheets for consultants (which are usually analyzed by someone just out of school). While you're thinking, your competition will be doing.

The Vision - Thing Big and Short: A “vision” always sounds impressive, doesn't it? Well, it's not, at least if you're going to spend a lot of time and money creating a corporate ego statement. Companies often waste a lot of time in groups brainstorming and wordsmithing with the end result being meaningless marketing speak. The vision should be the basis of your business, NOT a political production or consultant exercise. What can you do now? Where do you want to go? If you're starting your own company, what gets you excited? Your vision should be a short, direct statement. It's that simple (and that difficult).

The Mission - Motivate, Don't Pontificate: This is a particular pet peeve of mine. I've spent way too many hours working with executives in making earth-shaking decisions such as "should we use 'blue ribbon' or 'premier?' " So here's a freebie for you. "To be the premier provider of customer solutions for (insert your product or service category)." There, now you can concentrate on making money, which is, let's face it, your primary business mission.

Seriously, a mission statement, like the vision, is a mechanism to help you and your team stay focused and motivated. If "Just Do It" weren't already taken by Nike, it would serve most companies if they backed it up with good products, integrity in customer relations and respect for their employees.

The Marketing Strategy - One Page is Enough: This should be considered the same as your “business” strategy. After all, as management guru Peter Drucker noted, “A business has two functions, marketing and innovation. Everything else is overhead.” And, I'd add that innovation and marketing go hand-in-hand - and everyone in your company is focused on marketing (or should be) - including (especially) the receptionist. So, if your company's strategy doesn't fit on one side of a single page and you can't share it with your employees, something is wrong. (Tactics require a lot more detail and people often say strategy when they really mean tactics.)



I once spent three months at a major corporate division doing NOTHING but trying to fit reams of politically correct positioning onto the corporate mandated 10 pages. I succeeded, but the type was very small. More important, the strategy remained a highly confidential document never shared with employees and, as far as I could tell, never really read by the HQ executives for whom it was prepared.

Strategy is absolutely essential, but it should be based on reality, not what you or I (or your CEO) want to think (painful as this can be). Deal with the facts and get input from the front lines. Your employees know things you don't, and they're the ones who have to implement the strategy.

The Bottom Line: Keep it simple, keep it real and keep moving. Whatever you do, be prepared to change. What works today may not tomorrow. A three-year strategic plan, complete with detailed tactics? *Fuhgedaboutit!* Six months is an eternity in business these days, so do your vision, mission, strategy— get help if you need it— and get going.

Mary is based in Albuquerque, New Mexico and works with clients all over the nation and in the virtual world. You can contact her at www.maryschmidt.com or 505-856-2551.