

## What Your Crummy Blinking VCR Lights Taught us about Better Marketing

Do you remember your old VCR? You know - the one that had an intermittent rendering of "12:00am" to seemingly remind you just how ignorant you really were in your understanding of simple electronic devices. If you were savvy enough, of course, you read the thick VCR manual and figured out how to program the big black box to tell time correctly – and perhaps every so slightly more important, you probably also knew how to record actual television programs. But, we are not all alike. Sadly, if you were like me (re: most Americans), it meant that you needed either the help of a small paperback book, or perhaps a strip of black, electrical tape to cover the blinking, digital glow. Ultimately, no matter the case, you ended up having to develop an either a well-invested or singularly creative solution for a particularly grating problem. And, believe it or not, it's that small, yet ubiquitous "12:00am" blinking VCR light in American homes that reveals a couple things about how you can approach successful marketing principles and practice for your business plans. Both are wildly different, yet valid approaches to improving your marketing plans; both based on one little, blinking light...

Read the manual, silly

Growing up, my father would always, ALWAYS, skip the whole "before operating: read the manual" step to building desks, shelves or chairs, or starting up new electronic devices like walkmans, clocks and yes, the dreaded VCR. His natural aversion to step-by-step instruction seems mostly bravado – a sort of, "nobody tells me how to fix things" mentality. It was something I learned as a child in watching him...and overcame in adulthood as I understood that complexity and left over parts necessitated a better way to do things. In essence though, I learned that if I were to build a better "mousetrap" for my professional marketing plans, or particle board desk for that matter, I was going to have to be more deliberate in my execution. I was not necessarily consistent (see: blinking VCR lights), but I grew in awareness, which is the new step one to better marketing. Thusly, as I approach marketing plans today, I have learned to become more deliberate and careful so as to provide a higher level of execution.

You see, not until you take the care to read through the manual do you understand how to build things right. And not until you know how to build things right will you be able to execute at a higher level. With your marketing plans you may be tempted to take short cuts...after all; you probably know a little about "marketing" and can do things on your own anyway, right? After all, how hard could marketing be? Besides that, professional marketing help can be expensive.

But think about those projects my father built without a manual. There were often parts left over. And while it simply meant a leaning bookshelf or canted table back then it can be more damaging to your brand and business today. Imagine canted brand development? It would be one where your company almost looks right but something is missing...and that costs you real dollars in your business. If people can't trust that you took the time to really think through your business, that you took the necessary time to execute at the highest level, they will choose elsewhere. And why not? With competition what it is, the margin between you and your competitor (who may be indeed reading manuals left and right) is slight to begin with.

This is the type of thinking that helps a corporation formulate its marketing strategy, Customer Value Proposition, and brand distinctive. They begin to elevate their thinking to embrace a deliberate strategy which overtakes tactical thought and long-term plans become a force to be reckoned with.

I realize you may be a ways away from corporate-hood, but the bottom line is the same. Take the time to figure out the right rules to marketing, get the professional help you need if you need it. At the very least, bounce ideas off someone. It could save you thousands (and depending on your enterprise – hundreds of thousands) in the long run.

Pass the electrical tape, please

Of course, as I suggested in my infinite wisdom: we are not all alike. We don't all have the ability to become deliberate and plodding in our planning to lead us to a higher level of execution. Fortunately, there is a flip side to becoming exceptionally deliberate and thoughtful in your marketing plans that can also provide a good foundation to business success. While it may be the tougher go of things, excelling at the creative solution side of things can also work.

It's like the answer to the problem of your blinking VCR lights again. Rather than fix the light you put a black piece of tape over the problem. Poof. Your problem is "gone". No more blinking light. While it isn't a permanent solution it will suffice in keeping your plans afloat.

Here's the great part though. Problems have often initiated business solutions that were unexpected because of creative responses. The creativity needed to find solutions is key to building better marketing in that creativity can propel your plans beyond what you even expected. I go back to the familiar example of Henry Ford's car design problem.

Henry Ford needed to build a better car. Rather than rest on the previous available solution of a horse and carriage, he decided to build an automotive that labored without "horsepower". He's often quoted as saying: "If I'd asked my customers what they wanted, they'd have said a faster horse."

Instead of getting a faster horse, he focused on a more creative solution and all these years later (today's market notwithstanding) the automobile is one of the most critical, creative solutions of our age. Essentially, instead of reading the "manual", he decided to look elsewhere, to find a more creative solution beyond the manual. He found the electrical tape of his day and turned to innovation and creativity, not the standard rules or directions.

You can do the same as you approach your marketing. By looking beyond the rules you can find creative solutions that can trigger a movement unavailable elsewhere. Think about Apple, Nike and even KaBoom! cleaning products. Do you think they stuck with the manual? Or do you think they sought other, creative solutions?

What blinking lights can do for you

How you approach your marketing plans? Do you focus on deliberate studied plans, or by thinking about creative solutions outside the norm? Maybe even a mix of the two. As you approach the solutions to your marketing plans and focus on improving your business think about the lessons learned from the blinking lights of your old VCR. Find your approach, commit to it, and apply it decisively to how you develop your marketing and your business will reap the benefits. Now, if I could only figure out how to watch "live TV" and program my DVR at the same time I'd be all set.