

# The Nine Deadly Mistakes Small Business Owners Make When Buying Marketing Help

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Most small business owners are experts at what they do, and much less expert at selling and marketing what they do. That's why there usually comes a time in the life of a small business when the owner looks for marketing help.

What are the choices?

## **1. Read a bunch of books and hope the authors have some idea what they're talking about.**

Don't get me wrong – there are a lot of great marketing books out there. The problem is, when you're a beginner, how can you tell good from bad? I bet that I could write a book on “Namibian cuisine of the 1960s” and get twenty friends to give it five stars on amazon!

The other problem is, you don't have time to become a marketing expert. You're too busy running your business to enroll in an informal business school. And the last thing you need is MBA envy – believe me, most MBAs know a lot less about marketing than you do.

## **2. Ask others for help.**

An excellent choice – when others have the knowledge, experience, and time to give you advice. And when you have the time, support, and energy to implement that advice. Too often, small business marketing is the blind leading the blind, with no one in possession of the eternal principles of human psychology that drive all successful marketing.

## **3. Hire a pro.**

Looking for the magic bullet? Want someone else to take charge and make everything better? Wanna put your business in the hands of the “pros”?

It's alluring. It's tempting. It's potentially rewarding. And that's why so many business owners rush blindly into hiring a marketing firm, heedless of the problems and potential disastrous consequences of outsourcing this most important aspect of your business.

To help small business owners avoid these damaging mistakes, I've written this report. It includes a questionnaire that you should ask every marketing consultant and marketing firm before giving them a dime of your money or control over a word of your marketing.

## The Nine Deadly Mistakes

### 1. Giving up control of the marketing of your business.

Marketing is the life of your business. No marketing, no business. Despite the expertise and experience of the marketing consultant you hire, they aren't going to **care** as much about your business as you do. You're just one client on their roster. Your life-and-death crises are just another day at the office for them.

Nobody **knows** as much about your business as you do. While a marketing consultant can help you package and refine your message, the message must, ultimately, be yours. You're not Coke or Nike, a faceless corporation that hires agencies to make up a new personality every couple of years. Your character, your values, your ethics, your passion, your talents, your expertise – these are the cornerstones of your business. Keep them out of your marketing and you have absolutely no compelling message whatsoever.

#### 1. Ask the marketing consultant:

? "Will you work with me to incorporate my knowledge, my personality, and my values into the marketing campaign?"

? "Will you spend the time to really understand me and my business?"

### 2. Hiring an "image" marketer who knows graphic design, not business.

Isn't it cool to see your new logo for the first time? You feel, well, real. Professional. Impressive. That feeling can be addictive. Every time you run an ad, print a brochure, put up a new sign, or buy a radio spot, you get that ego-stroking feeling again.

Image advertisers understand this. The old joke in the ad industry is, "Give me a client with a dog food company whose wife loves French Poodles." All they have to do is put a French Poodle in every ad and on every package, and they have a customer for life, regardless of how well the ads perform.

Your "image" should not be of concern to you. You're not running for Citizen of the Year. You don't need to worry about what the whole world thinks of you. All you need to worry about is whether qualified prospects will give you money in exchange for the value you provide.

The truth is, "image" ads don't sell. They brag. They amuse. They mystify. But they don't sell. That's why image advertisers will discourage you from putting direct response elements into those ads – they don't want you to know how poorly those ads perform.

But, you protest, the biggest companies in the world use image advertising. Surely it must work.

It works under two conditions:

1. You sell a commodity like sugar water or sneakers that really is no better than its competitors, so you have nothing meaningful to say. As they say in the advertising industry, “If you have nothing to say, say it with music.”
2. It works if you have millions or billions of dollars to spend on your marketing. I’m assuming that you don’t. (If you **do**, we have **got** to talk!)

If you truly care about your “branding” (the silly marketing buzzword of the decade), then build a creative, customer-focused business that acts ethically and gives back to the community, and publicize that. The rest is ego-stroking.

Effective advertising is simply “salesmanship in print.” It uses strong headlines to attract the attention of qualified prospects, and enough words to present an irresistible offer to those prospects. Any design elements must contribute to the sale.

**2. Ask the marketing consultant:**

- ? “Do your ads have fancy graphics and a lot of white space, or do they use words to sell or generate leads?”
- ? “How do you feel about ‘branding’?”
- ? “Can you show me examples of ad campaigns you’ve created?”

**3. Hiring marketing firms that brag about the awards they win.**

Who gives those awards? The marketing industry.

On what basis? Creativity. Not results.

If creative marketing led to sales, the sock puppet would still be working for pets.com, and whatever company shot a hamster from a cannon would still be listed on NASDAQ.

Did you know that in a survey, most consumers couldn’t identify the brand of battery sold by the bunny?

If your marketing firm is concerned about awards, their goals are in direct conflict with yours. Run away.

**3. Ask the marketing consultant:**

- ? “Does your firm try to win awards for your campaigns?”

- ? "Have you won any awards? Who awarded them? What were the reasons you won?"
- ? "Do you highlight these awards in your own marketing?"

#### **4. Hiring a marketing/ad agency that gets commissions from the media they buy for you.**

Here's a riddle for you:

Q: When is the client not the client?

A: When the marketing agency gets a commission from the media's advertising department.

If your ad agency gets paid by the radio station based on the amount of air time you buy, isn't their goal to sell you as much air time as they possibly can? Don't they naturally want to bump you to the media where they get the fattest commission checks? Even if you trust your individual consultant, why work with someone who has such corporate pressure to bring in the bucks at your expense?

This type of firm won't even think about marketing methods that won't pay them a commission: direct mail, classified ads, joint ventures, seminars and workshops. For small businesses, these are often the most cost-effective and highly leveraged forms of marketing that exist.

#### ***4. Ask the marketing consultant:***

- ? "Do you receive a commission or any consideration from the media you sell to me?"
- ? "What media do you suggest I use to market my business?"

(If they give you an answer right away, run away! This is the last thing you determine in a marketing campaign, not the first. For more information, see my article, "[How to Get Maximum Results from Minimum Advertising Spend.](#)")

- ? "Do you have experience using direct mail, classified ads, joint ventures, seminars and workshops?"

## **5. Hiring a marketing firm that doesn't promise and deliver results-accountable marketing.**

Results-accountable marketing has three components:

1. You ask for a response of some sort from your prospect in every element of every marketing campaign.
2. You track responses, so that you can attribute each response to the element that elicited it and measure the effectiveness of each element in Return on Investment (ROI) terms.
3. You constantly strive to improve every element of your marketing based on performance, testing on a small and cheap scale and then rolling out the winners.

If your marketing firm can't do that, run away! You wouldn't invest money in the stock market and pay no attention to your returns. Why would you let someone invest your marketing capital that way?

### ***5. Ask the marketing consultant:***

- ? Does every element of your marketing campaigns include a mechanism for the prospect to respond directly?
- ? Do you track responses and calculate the ROI of each element?
- ? Do you work with me to tweak existing campaigns to improve their ROI?
- ? What is the minimum ROI I should expect to get from my investment with you?
- ? Will you guarantee your work by structuring part of your fee on a pay-for-results basis?

## **6. Hiring a marketing firm that doesn't ask you tough questions about your business.**

Why would you want a marketing firm to make you uncomfortable? Why would you want them to challenge your fuzzy claims of "great service" or "lowest prices" or "biggest inventory"? Because great marketing of an insufficient product will cause it to fail faster.

Marketing that doesn't pay attention to the internal reality of the business is sizzle with no steak (or for my fellow vegetarians, broth with no tofu). Any marketing campaign that doesn't strive to improve the business while communicating the business is missing a huge opportunity.

Changing the business often includes brainstorming and implementing service improvements, new twists, specialization to appeal to a hungry niche, training and rewarding employees for personal development, and restructuring to become more efficient and effective.

**6. Ask the marketing consultant:**

- ? "Do you work with me to improve my business on the inside?"
- ? "Do you have expertise in organization development?"
- ? "Can you coach me and my people to do what we have to do to make the reality of our business match what we say about it?"

**7. Hiring a marketing firm that doesn't try to learn as much as possible about your market.**

When it comes to marketing, one size does not fit all. The essence of marketing is empathizing with your market. If your marketing firm just wants to talk about you, about your products and services, about your convenient location, about your fancy features and terrific people, they're being lazy.

Effective sales and marketing efforts enter the conversation your prospects are already having in their minds. If your marketing firm won't take the time to talk to your best customers, your disgruntled customers, and your ideal prospects, they're going to produce irrelevant material that won't attract the interest of the people who can give you money.

It will be just like creating a campaign in a foreign language. Remember, no matter how brilliant Shakespeare is in the original, he just doesn't impress the Ovahimba tribe of Southwest Africa.

**7. Ask the marketing consultant:**

- ? "Will you take the time to talk with my best customers, to find out why they choose to do business with me? Do you have experience talking with them in a way that makes me look good?"
- ? Will you take the time to talk with disgruntled or former customers, to find out how I failed them? Do you have experience talking with them in a way that shows them that I'm interested in winning back their business?

- ? Will you help me find out as much as I can about my prospects: how they live, what they buy, what they care about, what keeps them up at night, and what do they most want to achieve?
- ? Will you help me craft a message that using this information to connect with my market?

## **8. Hiring a marketing firm that doesn't understand the power of testimonials.**

Testimonials are the single most powerful part of marketing. What **you** say about your business is barely credible compared to what a **customer** says. I know millionaires whose entire marketing strategy was to collect powerful testimonials from happy clients, and use those testimonials in every way imaginable.

Yet most businesses never ask for testimonials! They have a thin file of unsolicited "love letters" from customers that they file away and never use. Any marketing campaign must include a system for collecting and using testimonials to tell your story.

### ***8. Ask the marketing consultant:***

- ? "Do you have a process for collecting testimonials from past and present customers?"
- ? "Can you help me implement a system to collect testimonials from my customers on an ongoing basis?"
- ? "How do you typically use testimonials in marketing campaigns?"

## **9. Hiring a marketing firm that doesn't appreciate the power of information.**

No matter what you sell, you can generate and convert leads by giving away valuable information. Look at it this way: if your prospect already had all the information they needed, they would have already bought. Their own ignorance or uncertainty is standing between them and taking action.

Using information to market is good for your business for three reasons.

First, it positions you as a trusted expert advisor, rather than a greedy peddler. By giving them the information they need, you automatically leap ahead of your competitors as someone your prospects can trust.

Second, providing valuable information creates indebtedness in your prospects. If you give them something of value, they will feel a need to reciprocate. Often that dynamic will push a

prospect into becoming a customer. Remember the Hari Krishna airport strategy of giving people flowers, and then asking for money. That order was not an accident.

Third, offering valuable information gains the attention of qualified prospects. A free report, audiotape, eBook, or lecture that addresses a burning question in your prospects' minds will cut through the clutter of advertising and make your prospects seek you out.

The trouble is, most of us have trouble expressing the valuable information we possess. Most of us don't even recognize the value of that information to our prospects. A marketing firm that doesn't know how to get that information out of you and how to use it effectively will leave way too much business on the table.

**9. Ask the marketing consultant:**

- ? "Can you help me identify the information that will attract and help my prospects?"
- ? "Can you help me turn that information into lead generators?"
- ? "Do you have experience incorporating lead generators into a comprehensive marketing campaign?"

**Ask Me Too!**

I hope this list of questions will help you avoid wasting money on ineffective marketing consultants and marketing consultants with hidden agendas.

I also hope this article will cause you to consider howieconnect for your marketing needs. If you'd like to talk with me, and ask me all these and other tough questions, I'd be delighted.

For more information about my services, visit my web site:  
[www.howieconnect.com](http://www.howieconnect.com).

Email me: [howie@howieconnect.com](mailto:howie@howieconnect.com).

Call me at (609) 883-2661.

To find out how to attract all the business you can handle and end cold calling forever, visit [www.leadsintogold.com](http://www.leadsintogold.com).

Thanks for reading!

Remember, it's your business. Let it shine!

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