

Brand Busters

7 Common Mistakes Marketers Make

*Lessons from the world of
technical and scientific products*

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Brand Buster #4

Trying to Please Everyone

HERE'S AN INTERESTING and enlightening exercise: take a couple of minutes this week to find a listing of the most popular songs on the radio for the year you were a senior in high school.

For the sake of this exercise, let's pick 1975—a late Baby Boom graduation year. Here were some of the most popular songs of that year:

“Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song”

—B.J. Thomas

“Bungle In The Jungle” —Jethro Tull

“Convoy” —C.W. McCall

“Feelings” —Morris Albert

“Holy Roller” —Nazareth

“The Hustle” —Van McCoy

“Laughter in the Rain” —Neil Sedaka

“Love Will Keep Us Together” —Captain & Tenille

“My Eyes Adored You” —Frankie Valli

“That's The Way (I Like It)” —KC & the Sunshine Band

“Who Loves You” —The Four Seasons

“Wildfire” —Michael Murphey

These are not on many people's lists of timeless pop classics. Some (okay, most) were pretty darn bad. Nor are these the artists

who will be remembered as the top acts in their pop music sub-genres. And even if you like one or more of these artists, these songs—which were, remember, big hits—were almost certainly not their best work.

So why were these all such big hit songs? One reason: because, although they were created to appeal to large segments of people, they weren't created to appeal to *everybody*.

Maybe *you* didn't like "Wildfire," but millions of other pop music fans did; in fact, since 1975, "Wildfire" has been played on radio and television more than *four million* times, making it one of the most played songs ever.

Now, we don't consider Michael Murphey a giant in the world of popular music. He's not up there with the Beatles or the Rolling Stones.

When you think about it, though, Michael Murphey was a pretty good marketer. Here's why. Some people (like me) hated that song. In fact, I'd wager that millions upon millions of people disliked it and still do. But a fraction of a percent of the public loved it. And in a market like music, that's all it takes to be a top seller. Is there a lesson here for us? Yes.

Michael Murphey, whether he knew it or not, avoided our Brand Buster #4—the mistake of trying to please everyone—and rode his acumen in music and marketing to the top of the charts.

Lots of people never do understand this lesson. And it's for good reason. It's because a lot of people come into a marketing role from the world of sales. Arriving on the job, they don't understand that the role of marketing is as much about "no" as it is about "yes." This is a foreign concept to most people with a sales background. But when you're in marketing, you have to embrace the idea that you can't please everyone and you make more money when you stop trying.

Yet I've seen many marketers insist that everyone in their product category should be interested in buying their product. So they go to market with messages designed to appeal to everyone: the

prospect who buys on price, the one who buys on high performance, the one who cares most about dependability, the one who is looking for the most high-tech features, the one who wants only the latest and greatest, and so on. In trying to appeal to everyone, these marketers weaken their message to the point that they end up appealing to no one.

To put it another way, there's no shame in being the Michael Murphy of marketing. If you'd like to learn how, read on.

How to Light a Fire Under Your Customers

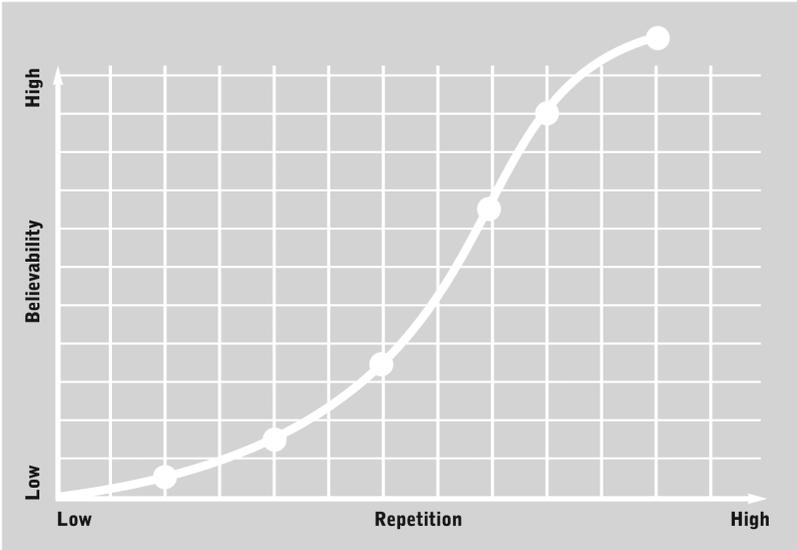
Any tenderfoot scout worth his merit badges can tell you the way to start a fire is not to spread your embers all over the yard. If you really want to generate some heat, you consolidate your embers in a small fire pit.

And any swami worth his meditation pillow can tell you that it's easy to sleep on a bed of nails; your weight is distributed evenly over all of the little points, so they don't penetrate your skin. But you can't sleep on a single nail. Without any other support, you're too heavy. You're looking at a bad puncture wound (and probably a tetanus shot).

On the other hand, as a marketer, you're trying to poke into your prospect's consciousness. You don't want your prospect to fall asleep on all those little points: you want your sharpest, tallest nail to make the strongest impression possible, so your prospect will remember you.

And, just so we keep as many metaphors in the air as possible (we've got pop music and nails floating up there nicely), the right way to light a fire under your best prospects is not to diffuse your energy. In marketing, it means finding out the strengths of your brand that really resonate with your customers and making the most of them. That means being willing to say "no"—by refusing to load your marketing communications with ancillary points that don't matter to most of your audience.

This isn't just my opinion. According to a recent study, simple ads are more compelling and believable, and have a greater "Truth Effect" than ads with more complicated messages.¹



The Truth Effect

Good things happen when you repeat yourself. Studies show frequency of repetition increases the believability of simple advertising messages. Marketers refer to this phenomenon as the "Truth Effect."

In this study, over the course of two sessions, researchers exposed 237 subjects to advertising claims, some true and some false. Subjects saw some claims only in the first session, some only in the second session, and some in both sessions. One group of subjects was asked to gauge the truth or falsity (yes, that's a real word) of the claims on a seven-point scale from "definitely false" (1) to "definitely true" (7). Another group rated whether the messages were easy to understand, from "difficult to understand" (1) to "very easy to understand" (7).

The results? When researchers asked both groups whether they believed the claims in the ads, subjects reported claims they encountered more than once were more believable—whether these claims were actually true or false. (We'll talk more about the importance of frequency in Chapter 5: Forgetting That People Forget.)

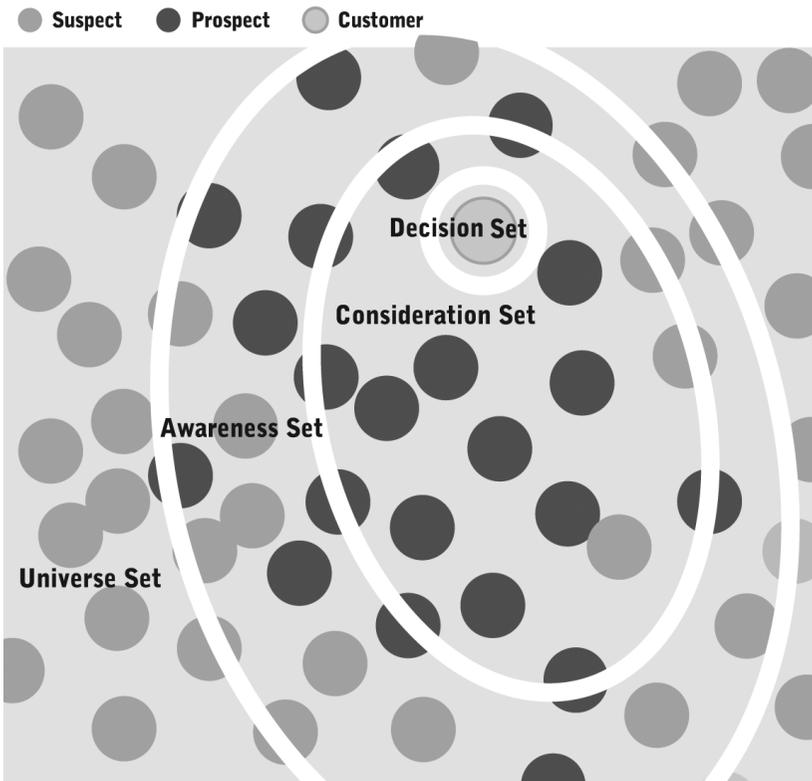
But the subjects in this study reported another interesting fact as well. The other factor measured in this study had to do with “involvement” with the ads; that is, when test subjects were asked to judge the truth or falsity of ad claims, they became more involved with the ads. The more involved the subjects became, the more skeptical they were of the claims being made. In other words, if you make a lot of claims in your ads, you're inviting greater skepticism than if you make just one, strong claim.

Based on decades of personal experience as a marketer, I would also suggest to you that another problem with most advertising is that it tries to close the sale in one shot instead of inviting *awareness* and *consideration*. You can't sell a product unless you have a prospect considering your product for purchase. And you can't have consideration until you have basic awareness. You might think of your customer's mind as a continuum in terms of ever-narrowing “sets”: from the “universe set” of all companies (including you and all your competitors) that can provide what the customer wants; to the “awareness set” of products the customer has heard of; to the “consideration set” of products the customer will evaluate further; to the “decision set,” or the product the customer actually chooses.

Most marketers head straight for the decision set. They think their ads should be loaded with all the details that are going to push their customers past consideration and into the decision set.

But, as we've just mentioned, customers have a harder time believing a lot of claims. And unless you're doing direct marketing, your advertising isn't really trying to convince a prospect to buy on the spot anyway. All you want is consideration: talk to a sales rep, visit the dealer, look up the website, call this number, find out more. Mass media are ideal for messages that promote aware-

ness and consideration. One study showed that people exposed to product ads were nearly twice as likely to buy those products as people not exposed to those ads.² And a 2004 study of technology purchases showed that 43.8 percent of decision-makers will strongly consider buying a product with high brand awareness, versus just 18.6 percent who would favorably consider buying a brand they've hardly heard of.³



The customer mindset continuum

In your customer's mind, all purchase decisions involve movement from the "universe set" of all products like yours, through the "awareness set" and "consideration set" to the actual purchase or "decision set." Moving from set to set requires a variety of strategies and considerations.

There's plenty of time to get complicated and cover all the details. That time is closer to the actual sale, and has more to do with "sales" than "marketing." If you want to really attract prospects, though, you have to keep the message simple and pointed. And you can't be afraid of the magic word.

And the Magic Word Is . . .

"No."

No, really. Perhaps the most important word in the marketer's dictionary is "no." In fact, one of the ways you can differentiate between sales and marketing is that sales is all about getting to "yes," whereas, in a profound way, marketing is about getting to "no."

What do I mean? Well, the idea of getting to "yes" is obvious. If you're a salesperson with a prospect on the line, you want to get your prospects nodding and keep them nodding until the sale has been consummated.

The same is true for marketing, of course. You want to find those prospects you can hand over to your salespeople who are going to nod all the way to the bank. But even more important, you have to get a lot of heads shaking "no." The reason, of course, is that the last thing you want to do is turn over bad prospects (wrong market segment) to your salespeople. Appealing to the wrong market segment does nothing but waste time, money, and effort. So good marketing efforts *must* be built around the idea of weeding out the chaff—that is, quickly and efficiently excluding people for whom your product is really not right. When you do this, you increase the appeal your offer has for the people you really do fit well.

I know this seems a little counterintuitive, but let's examine the idea for a moment. First, let's pretend you're a marketer for a company that makes optical scanners. You have a new scanner that's the world's fastest, bar none; in fact, it's three times faster than the next fastest machine on the market. You decide to build a marketing effort to generate leads, and lots of them. So you go

out with a message that says, simply, “You have to experience this new scanner to believe it.”

And you get a lot of leads; people *love* new things. But when you give the leads to your salespeople, here’s what they find out:

- Lots of people don’t care about the speed of your scanner. They’re happy with a slow scanner.
- Some people wish their scanner worked faster, but image quality is more important to them and yours isn’t good enough.
- Size is critical to some people. Some people have to fit the scanner in a crowded production line, and your scanner is quite a bit bigger than most.
- Some prospects care more about price than speed, image quality, or size.
- Other prospects care primarily about the dimensions of the image they can scan.
- A certain percentage of prospects cares about ease of repair, parts availability, and uptime versus downtime.

What’s the percentage of leads you’ve invited into your marketing funnel and perhaps given to your salespeople that are simply no good? Even if it’s only twenty or thirty percent—and it could be much, much more—you’re wasting that much of your sales force’s time. Instead of getting to “yes,” they have to go through a lot of “no.” And that’s a job marketing can do far more efficiently.

Instead, what if you go out with a marketing message that says, “Scan Three Times Faster than Anything Else Available”? Here’s what I think:

- You would drastically reduce the number of bad leads you turn over to your sales force. People who don’t care about fast scanning won’t waste their time responding.
- Your salespeople would close more sales quicker by being able to focus on legitimate prospects.

- The raw number of leads would probably go down, *but maybe not by much*. Remember, on one hand, general claims and lots of fuzzy bullet points don't attract attention, and on the other, invite skepticism. A more pointed approach could actually *increase* the raw number of leads—and they'd all be better qualified than the leads you'd get when appealing to everyone was your goal.

The point is this: when readers see your ad that says “Scan Three Times Faster than Anything Else Available,” some of them say, “Yes, that's for me,” and others say, “Nope, not interested.” *And the “no” is at least as important as the “yes.”* That's why smart marketers are never afraid of “no.” They understand that “no” means their segmentation strategy is working beautifully. In fact, I maintain strategy is all about saying “no.”

“Sure,” you say, “but my product is different. My product is strong in a lot of areas. No one feature stands out. We have lots of strengths. We're not the best-quality product on the market, but we're right in there. Availability is pretty good. Service is in the top third of the industry.” To go back to the scanner example, it's pretty fast, with a pretty good image, in a moderate size, at a decent price.

Well, I have some bad news for you.

Great Brands Get Bad Grades

Now that I've been all over the map with analogies in this chapter, I thought I'd add one more. This one, perhaps more than all the others, really brings home the key to this common mistake and what it means.

Great brands are, for the most part, D students.

Don't believe me? Think of a great brand. Let's consider one everyone knows: McDonald's.

McDonald's is not known for its high-caliber cuisine. You don't take the boss there on her birthday or your spouse there on your

anniversary. The food at McDonald's is also far from the most healthful menu in town. **Food: D.**

Atmosphere isn't the chain's strong suit, either. It's not unpleasant, but it's not the sort of place you want to hang around all day; in fact, the colors and the hard seats and everything else about the place suggests it's an okay place to stop and gobble, but no place to linger over a cappuccino. **Atmosphere: D.**

Service? You've got to be kidding. Stand in line, grab your tray, and fill your own soft drink cup: **D.**

Fun? Ah, now we're getting somewhere.

Kids love McDonald's. McDonald's has built one of the world's great brands, in part, because of toys and playgrounds and food that appeals to kids.

And if you don't have kids, chances are good that you still eat at McDonald's because it's convenient and it's dependable. There's one on every corner and at every freeway exit, so it's easy to stop. And you may get a vastly superior hamburger at a local burger joint you've never heard of, but you might get a terrible hamburger, too. Why take chances when you know exactly what you're going to get at McDonald's?

So, yes, McDonald's does get at least one A. But it also gets a lot of Ds. And when you think about it, the problem with lots of other fast food chains is that they're B or C students, across the board.

It's that way with all sorts of products. You don't buy a Hummer for fuel efficiency. You don't buy an iPod because it will play your compact discs. You don't buy *Brand Busters* to read to the kids at bedtime.

Let's linger on iPods for one moment longer. The iPod has certainly been a hugely successful and much-imitated product. Even the models with the smallest hard drives can hold days' worth of music. Consumers can fit their entire music collections, and even their video libraries, on this tiny device. It's simply and elegantly designed. It has some versatility for storing other media—addresses and to-do lists and the like—but it's marketed and sold as a music and video player, and that's all most people use it for.

The iPod has been much imitated. As of this writing, all sorts of companies have media players on the market, some with technical advantages over the iPod—price, storage capacity, sound quality, functionality, you name it. But the iPod is still, by a wide margin, the industry leader because *it's a cool way to capture, store, and play your music and video*.

So why do you think *your* product should appeal to *everyone* in your category?

Here's a great exercise: make a list of all the factors that go into your prospects' buying decisions for your product. A representative list might include:

- Performance
- Price
- Service after the sale
- Availability
- Technical support
- Compatibility with other products

We'll stop there. Now, rate your product against all of these factors. Do you have one or two areas in which your product is outstanding? Or, to look at it from your customers' point of view, are there one or two reasons that come up repeatedly when you ask customers why they buy your product? Or, when you honestly evaluate your product, do you find yourself getting Bs across the board?

And now that you've done this exercise with your product, consider your competitors' products. How do they rate in the factors that are important to customers?

And one final note here: I'm not suggesting that you should not strive for excellence in all areas. McDonald's, for example, has done a lot to offer more healthful menu options and to eliminate some of its highest-fat-and-calorie options. Apple's iPod succeeds not only because of its single-focus simplicity, but also because of its sleek design, dependable technology, and the ease and simplicity

of purchasing music and video at the iTunes website. I certainly don't think you should ignore the realities of price or delivery or any of the features your customers truly want and appreciate in products like yours. What I'm saying is that *your product doesn't have to be excellent in all areas for it to be successful* and claiming excellence in all areas only makes your marketing weak, unfocused, and difficult to believe.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it. I suggest you find the story that works for you and do the same.

An Island You Can Command

What do the marketers we considered in the last section have in common? Clearly, McDonald's and Apple are market leaders. They dominate their markets in certain areas.

But not in all areas. As we've discussed, McDonald's isn't the place to go for a gourmet dinner. But they have created an island for themselves inside the sea of dining choices: the island of convenience and fun. It's their island, and no one touches them there.

Taking a closer look at Apple provides some additional perspective. I'll come back to the iPod in a moment. But first, let's look at Apple computers.

Apple has always been a strong brand with a highly developed sense of style and a fanatically loyal customer base. But it's not as if they haven't made mistakes. Back in the early days of personal computing, Apple held its products and its development code close to the vest. They didn't particularly want outside developers creating software for the Macintosh. They wanted control of their own destiny.

IBM, on the other hand, made its standards available to everyone. As a result, the PC exploded while the Macintosh pattered along. When it comes to personal computing, it's not really about the hardware, but about the software. And there was so much more software available for the PC—and so many people coming into the world of personal computing with so many different needs—that

the PC became the more popular choice. It was also the lower-cost choice; dozens of hardware manufacturers began to knock out PCs, and the price kept going down.

Today, in virtually every industry, you'll find that the PC is the desktop computer of choice. In health care, manufacturing, insurance, banking, retailing—pick an industry, and the PC is king.

Oh, right: I said *virtually* every industry. Because Apple did manage to keep a stranglehold on a couple of them.

One is commercial design. Today in ad agencies, graphic design firms, photo studios, video professionals, and other visually creative endeavors, the Mac is ubiquitous. Most graphic designers have never worked on a PC. Most have no desire to.

Another is education. Although lots of schools do use PCs, lots of them use Macs, too. The Macintosh is still commonly thought of as the “user-friendly” option.

In general, Apple has cultivated a reputation as being the computing company for creative people. Fiction writers, screenwriters, artists, photographers, even scientists—all are more likely to use Macs than PCs.

In other words, even though the PC, through the use of open programming standards, became the personal computing choice of the masses, the Mac maintained an island it could command. Creative people tend to think of PCs as computers for “business.” Macs are for people who, according to a long-running Apple campaign, “think different.” And these are people who are proud of their differences. Clearly, Apple can command this island because it understands its audience very well. It said “no” to the masses, focusing instead on a couple of key market segments it could dominate. As a result, the company generated margins on its hardware that PC-makers could only dream of.

Now, think back to our discussion about the iPod. Does it do more than play music? Well, yes. Does it matter? Not today. The iPod is the simplest, coolest MP3 player out there. There's a whole continent of these small mass storage devices out there. “Media player” is the island Apple has chosen to command.

And—just to bring the point full circle—the majority of those songs I listed at the start of this chapter are available today at the iTunes website. Songs from the mid-70s are *still* making money for their creators. Some popular music artists from days gone by are still making millions of dollars a year in royalties because they found their audiences and pleased them. You can too, if you remember that your audience is *not* everybody.

What Should You Remember from Reading this Chapter?

- ☛ **In trying to appeal to everyone, marketers** weaken their message to the point that they **end up appealing to no one.**
- ☛ In marketing, it's about finding out the **strengths of your brand that really resonate with your customers** and making the most of them.
- ☛ Studies show **if you make a lot of claims in your ads, you're inviting greater skepticism** than if you make just one strong claim. Narrow your focus.
- ☛ Most marketers use mass media to try to get customers to make a decision about their product. **Mass media are ideal for creating awareness and consideration.** One study showed people exposed to product ads were nearly twice as likely to buy those products as people not exposed to those ads.
- ☛ One of the ways you can differentiate between sales and marketing is: **sales is all about getting to "yes,"** whereas in a profound way, **marketing is all about getting to "no."**
- ☛ **Your product doesn't have to be excellent in all areas** for it to be successful. Claiming excellence in all areas only makes your marketing weak, unfocused, and difficult to believe.
- ☛ **Great brands are, for the most part, D students.** Successful brands have found their audience and played to them. You can too if you remember your audience isn't everybody.