

What Most Marketers

Don't Tell You

I have watched with interest how most marketers promise too much or too little to their clients. Marketers generally only control one of three important aspects needed to grow any nonprofit or business. Let me explain. What a marketer should be held accountable for is getting the phone to ring, getting increasing numbers of people to know about your business, and then helping you identify a brand that communicates what your business is. Marketing by itself cannot promise long-term growth. Marketers who promise this are literally guaranteeing too much. Likewise a marketer who doesn't take any responsibility in helping you grow your business is promising too little.

[Although much of the marketing Nehemiah Communications does serves nonprofits and churches, the discussion I am about to focus on is directed to the business market. Then at the end, I will note how these concepts can be adapted to churches and nonprofit organizations.]

In negotiating with potential clients, the challenge to professional marketers is the fact that ultimately he or she controls only one of the three efforts needed for a business to be successful and to grow.

The first critical effort is the one controlled by the marketer. People must hear about the products or services that the business provides. This is at the heart of what marketing is all about—to explain a product or service by differentiating it from the competition and then to communicate the value of what the business has to offer.

Many businesses fail at this point, because their owners or managers believe the value of their services or products is so obvious that they don't need to spend a lot of time or effort thinking about them; and frequently a strong emotional commitment can prevent clear thinking about the organization. In addition, ongoing operational needs press in on those responsible and demand attention. Yet getting marketing right is critical. Business leaders must carve out time to effectively communicate and market their businesses—even though that is hard to do. Fortunately, this is the one out of three success efforts for which marketers can take responsibility.

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The second critical effort is sales. Of course, people define sales in many different ways. What I will be referring to is closing the deal. That is the time when the customer has decided to buy the product or service you are offering. They know the cost and believe that paying it is a good investment of their hard-earned money. Unfortunately, disappointment often follows because the sales portion of business is not in keeping with the quality of the products or services. For example, there may be a great sales department but a poor

service or product to sell; or there may be great attention to the quality of the product or service without adequate attention to the sales environment of the business. In the first case, the poor quality or low perceived value of the product or service causes two problems. Over time it will discourage the sales personnel because—no matter how hard they work—sales will be very difficult to come by. In addition, customers will associate the organization or business mentally as a place where they do not want to do business. Where there is a high quality product or service but poor sales staff, there is an equally problematic situation. The sales staff is unable to communicate the quality and value of the product or service, or even after communicating it, the sales person is unable to motivate the customer to close the deal.



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After attending to marketing to get the phones ringing and sales to get the deals closed, the third critical effort is customer service. It is incredible that so many businesses are undependable in their commitments and unwilling to be accountable for the products and services they provide. Almost everyone who deals with home service vendors has stories to tell about broken appointments, failures to give estimates in a timely manner and failures to meet promised delivery dates. Because these customer services take place prior to the purchase of services or products, they could be considered part of the sales process. However, seldom are levels of customer services better after a purchase than they were before the purchase. No matter how good the quality of the product or service is, it is unlikely that people will do more business with that company if customers consistently experience a poor level of customer service.

Here is one last thought. When a business is beginning to work with a marketer, there is often an uncomfortable moment concerning money. A marketer must know the resources that will be made available for marketing efforts in order to create a realistic plan of action. Marketers who tell you they can do a marketing plan for you without knowing your budget should not be hired. Additionally, if you want a good marketing plan, be willing to spend some time and money with a marketer to develop that plan. If you make those investments and the marketing plan does not compel you, then it is time to find yourself another marketing firm and congratulate yourself on having saved a great deal of time and money.

So how can this information be adapted to churches and nonprofits? As in the business model, there are also three steps in making these organizations grow and be successful. The first step is getting people to hear about a church or nonprofit. With an average person receiving 3,000+ marketing messages a day, churches and nonprofits must market if they want to grow. The second sales step is acquiring and building relationships with members and volunteers. The last step still has a customer service orientation to it, but it is more complex. Members and volunteers are seeking to provide a service back to the church or nonprofit. As a result, part of the effective customer service orientation of these organizations is to provide people with service opportunities. In both sectors, staff have to be willing to reach out to potential members, volunteers and clients in a compelling way.