

Introduction

Marketing is Fire

The best way to understand marketing, the way its messages are sent, received, acted upon and spread, is to think of it as fire. Water metaphors that encouraged marketers to saturate consumers with a flood of messages are washed up. More recent attempts to explain the process by comparing marketing to contagion or guerilla warfare are incomplete. PyroMarketing, however, is more than simply a new metaphor; it describes an entirely new way to think about marketing. The recent presidential election, major motion pictures, and bestselling books illustrate its success. This book describes its principles—principles which, are dramatically different than the mass marketing approach they replace.

Mass marketing emerged from the economy of the mid 1900's as an effective way to promote products. It was a simpler time. A smaller selection of products competed for consumer's money. A smaller number of advertisements, delivered by many fewer media outlets, vied for their attention. People's perceptual capacity easily handled the load. People noticed advertising, eagerly processed its messages, and considered each offer. Advertising worked. And because it worked, it was quickly overworked. The key, it seemed, to increased sales was increased advertising. The more people were exposed to advertising, the more they bought. The two were linked. The relationship seemed causal. Business quickly noticed the connection and, in its quest to turn-up sales, has been turning-up advertising ever since.

Mass advertising's effectiveness, however, has been deteriorating since reaching its heyday in the late 1960's. Today, much of it inundates and annoys disinterested people with irrelevant messages.

Too Much

Advertising is everywhere. It clogs email in-boxes, it's stuck to supermarket floors, it's on movie theater screens, on gas pumps and even adorning restroom walls. Yesterday you were exposed to 3000 advertisements. Today you will be exposed to 3000 more. Can you name them all? Could you list 300? Are you able to recall 30, or even three?

The increase in ads as a "solution" for their decreased effectiveness has actually worsened the problem. The resulting deluge of advertising has saturated the market, but it hasn't improved results. The opposite is true. The rising tide of advertising has fostered a growing resistance and negativity among those it targets. Consumers are drowning.

A recent Yankelovich survey found that sixty-five percent of Americans feel "constantly bombarded with too much marketing and advertising." Sixty-one percent feel the volume of advertising is out of control, while sixty-nine percent are interested in devices that skip or block advertising messages. These attitudes represent more than a lack of effectiveness, but a powerful consumer backlash against this century-long torrent of advertising.

Sixty percent of consumers confess to having a much more negative opinion of marketing and advertising than they did a few years ago, the Yankelovich survey found, while fifty-percent actually avoid buying products that overwhelm them with advertising.

Astonishingly, a third of all Americans would be willing to accept a slightly lower

standard of living to live in a society without advertising. More than a failure to sell, advertising is actually repelling the very people it was supposed to attract. What's a marketer to do?

Sparking an Idea

I was depressed by those sobering statistics. I knew traditional mass marketing had lost its sting and that consumers were increasingly wary and resistant but I couldn't use that as an excuse. As the Senior Marketing Director for the Trade Book Group at Zondervan, the world's leading Christian publisher, I had books to sell. And while my experience had confirmed that most of what posed as advertising didn't work, it also proved that some did. Sure I had seen many advertised products fail, but I had seen others succeed, some fantastically so. What did the success stories have in common, I wondered? I scrutinized them, looking for the subtle differences that distinguished the winners from the losers, and four principles emerged. Those principles define an approach I call PyroMarketing.

PyroMarketing is a 'new' way to think about marketing—an effective method to deliver relevant messages to the right people and to foster their spread throughout society. Rather than trying to breakthrough the cacophony with bolder, louder, and more intrusive tactics, PyroMarketing provides a repeatable approach that recognizes and accommodates individual differences, acknowledges the power of experience, and leverages the influence of passionate customers.

A handful of business books have hinted at various elements of this new approach and some successful advertising campaigns have, perhaps unknowingly, followed a few of its tenets. This book, however, brings it all together. It organizes its principles into a four-step approach you, and everyone in your organization, can easily learn and apply.

My background is in Christian publishing and so this book will sometimes use examples and illustrations from that industry as I explain PyroMarketing. I will write often about The Passion of the Christ or a book called *The Purpose-Driven Life*, or even about the life and ministry of Jesus, as I demonstrate PyroMarketing's power. But—and this is important—these principles are NOT specific to books or Christian products. With very few exceptions, they will work for you too.

In an article titled, “How to Read a Business Book,” Fast Company magazine correctly noted recently that, “business books are necessarily about generalizations; your company is necessarily all about specifics. No one strategy or approach to marketing, no matter how brilliant, can be an exact fit.” That is true for PyroMarketing as well. As you read this book, don't try to apply each example exactly. Instead, first understand the PyroMarketing principle before asking yourself how it applies to your business. Rather than filling the book with case studies from businesses that have little in common with yours, I've tried to explain, and provide evidence for, PyroMarketing's basic principles. With a few exceptions, I've left their application up to you because you know your business better than anyone else.

That same Fast Company article went on to suggest that readers distill all business books down to the handful of ideas that represent their core message. This is good advice since it is easy to lose sight of the big picture as you read your way through an entire book. If you lose your way while reading PyroMarketing, you can return to the introduction and regain your bearings. The next paragraph distills the essence of this entire book.

The societal influences that allowed mass marketing to prosper have disappeared, rendering mass marketing ineffective. New circumstances have created an opportunity for a different marketing approach called PyroMarketing. It involves four steps.

1. Promote to the people most likely to buy
2. Give them an experience with your product or service
3. Help them tell others
4. Keep a record of who they are

This book captures this process and how it is applied with success to any product or service. It is as easy to learn as building a campfire and its principles are revealed in the lines of a song you may have sung while sitting beside one.

*It only takes a spark to get fire going
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;
That's how it is with God's love,
Once you've experienced it,
You spread the love to everyone
You want to pass it on.*

There are four steps to creating successful marketing campaigns. You build them the same way you build a campfire. If you were a scout or a camper, you already know the drill.

GATHER THE DRIEST TINDER

It only takes a spark to get a fire going

You can start a fire with a single spark, but only if you begin with the material most likely to light. You start a successful marketing campaign the same way, with the people most likely to buy. They are the driest tinder. The driest tinder are so inclined toward your product or service that the slightest application of heat from your marketing moves them past their ignition temperature and sets them alight.

Relevance is the key. Relevance, more than reach, more than frequency, more than creativity, more than anything else, determines whether your message will sell your product or alienate the consumer. Your product or service and its marketing message are most relevant to the driest tinder.

Who are the driest tinder for your product or service? What makes them so interested? What makes them so valuable? We will explore the driest tinder in chapter three.

TOUCH IT WITH THE MATCH

Once you've experienced it.

Touching it with the match means, to the extent you can, giving people an experience with your product or service. If you want them to laugh, don't tell them you're funny, tell them a joke. There is no faster way to move people to purchase than by letting them actually experience the benefits you claim.

There are many ways to help people experience the benefits of your product or service and you'll be amazed by the power in this approach. Touching it with the match is the subject of chapter six.

FAN THE FLAMES

You spread the love to everyone. You want to pass it on.

After touching the driest tinder with the match you've made the sale, but that's not where the process ends. The secret to a successful marketing campaign, like the key to building a campfire, isn't adding matches, it's fanning the flames. Fanning the flames means equipping people to spread your message through word-of-mouth. If

they bought and love your product or service they are ready to exponentially expand the reach of your marketing by telling others. Once you understand why this is true, you can enhance the process with tactics and tools that help your customers spread the word to their network of like-minded friends. Properly equipped they can convince people whose purchase threshold was far beyond the reach of your marketing.

SAVE THE COALS

Traditional marketers spend budget after budget trying to find the same buyers—building the same fire—over and over again. They lure consumers from the masses with their promotions, but let them slip quietly back into the crowd after they buy. You can't contact them if you don't know who they are. Naturally, if you can't contact them, you can't encourage word-of-mouth or promote future products either. Traditional mass marketing is like renting an apartment where new money is required for each month you stay. Traditional marketers spend each new budget to find many of the same people who bought the last time.

PyroMarketers save the coals. Saving the coals means keeping a record of the people that respond to your marketing so you can contact them, quickly and affordably, the next time you have something of interest, or mobilize them to promote your business to their family and friends. PyroMarketing is more like buying a house. Marketing becomes an investment. Each new campaign is a payment building equity for the future. Before long you own a segment of the market outright and can use new marketing resources to build new fires.

PyroMarketing is simple and it really works. Some recent examples provide impressive proof.

The Passion of the Christ, a movie depicting the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, became a box office smash, grossing over \$551 million worldwide in its first nine weeks despite the use of obscure foreign languages, an R rating, English subtitles, the lack of a major distributor and a comparatively modest marketing budget. Yet, it is the highest-grossing R-rated movie of all time and the most successful independent film ever. Following its theatrical re-release for Easter 2005, it may well be the highest-grossing film of all time.

The Purpose-Driven Life, a book explaining God's five purposes for successful living and authored by a Southern Baptist minister known primarily in religious circles, sold nearly one million copies each month from its release in October of 2002 through the summer of 2004 and continues at a bestselling pace. It sold more copies than any other book in America for 2003 and again in 2004, beating titles by the biggest names in publishing and outselling the next bestselling nonfiction title by a factor of ten!

Publisher's Weekly called it the bestselling hardcover book in American history.

Christianity, founded by an itinerant Jewish carpenter before the advent of telephones, television, instant messaging, press kits, the internet, motorized transportation, or even the printing press, has prospered for over 2000 years, growing to become the world's largest religion with 2 billion adherents, some of whom have sacrificed their lives for the faith.

How do such phenomena occur? How does their popularity rise so quickly, spread so far, and endure so long? Why are people so passionate about them, giving their money, their

time—even their lives in support? And, how can business people foster similar zeal toward their products, service, or cause?

The success of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, *The Passion of the Christ*, or of Christianity, remains puzzling to many, but not to those who know their secret. What do these remarkable success stories have in common? They each used PyroMarketing and so can you.

Barriers Burned Away

It began around 9 O'clock on Sunday evening October 8, 1871, somewhere in the vicinity of the O'Leary barn. Apart from these few facts, little is known about the exact origin of the Great Chicago Fire. Though competing legends persist, the most common is that a cow belonging to Mrs. Catherine O'Leary kicked over a lantern igniting the contents of a barn laden with a winter's provision of coal, wood shavings and hay. Though mystery surrounds its beginning, the fire's subsequent growth is well documented.

It had been an especially dry autumn as, in the words of nineteenth-century historian, A. T. Andreas, "Nature had withheld her accustomed measure of prevention, and man had added to the peril by recklessness."¹ The city's dry wooden buildings, constructed one next to the other, offered little resistance to the advancing flames. Driven by strong winds from the southwest, the fire raced across them like a fuse, burning an unpredictable path toward the city's center. By 1:30AM it reached the courthouse. Ninety minutes later it had consumed the Palmer House and the offices of the Chicago Tribune; pursuing thousands of residents as they evacuated to the safety of the city's North Division. By Monday noon the fire had reached the city's northern limit. It took a saving rain on Tuesday morning to finally blunt its progress and quench its insatiable flame. At last,

exhausted Chicagoans had a reprieve from their retreat and a moment to look back, over their shoulders, at the smoldering ruins of their city.

Every end is a beginning. To characterize the Great Chicago Fire only as a tragedy misses its greater impact. While it destroyed one Chicago, it gave birth to another. In 1871 300,000 residents mourned all they had lost to the fire, but today 8 million Chicagoans can celebrate the vigorous future it helped them find.ⁱⁱ “The world as it is to people of this vicinity, has changed,” one resident wrote days after the disaster, “an age has closed, and a new epoch...is about to begin.”ⁱⁱⁱ Fire transformed the people of Chicago by showing them a surprising new opportunity.

On Wednesday, October 11, 1871, the Chicago Tribune published a half sheet of paper with a story about the fire and an editorial that began: “*CHEER UP In the midst of a calamity without parallel in the world's history, looking upon the ashes of thirty years' accumulation, the people of this once beautiful city have resolved that CHICAGO SHALL RISE AGAIN!*” And rise it did.

Within seven years the city’s population had nearly doubled. A decade later it eclipsed one million, fulfilling the prophecy of wealthy Chicago booster John Stephen Wright who predicted, “Five years will give Chicago more men, more money, more business, than she would have had without this fire.”

Construction on more than eight miles of street frontage began within one year of the fire. Buildings of brick, stone and iron replaced the shoddy wood plank construction that marked pre-fire Chicago. In 1885 the city became home to the first skyscraper by erecting the Home Insurance Building to a height of nine stories. Rather than load-bearing walls, it used a skeletal frame to support the building’s weight: a novel design

that took construction to unprecedented heights. The people of the city were not merely rebuilding what they had lost; they were building something entirely new and markedly better.

Among the art and literature inspired by the fire was a novel written by a minister and titled, Barriers Burned Away. In the love story, Dennis Fleet tries to win the affection of Christine Ludolph, the daughter of a wealthy art dealer, but her atheism and aristocratic arrogance stand in the way. During the fire, however, Christine loses her wealth, her father and her unbelief, declaring, “All barriers are burned away,” she embraces God, Dennis and a new life.

The accumulations of our past can exert a terrible influence on our possible futures. Their weight, hanging around our necks like an albatross, can limit our choice of path and pace. The Great Chicago Fire destroyed large sections of the city, but it was also a purifying event that burned away the barriers to a dynamic new future. Unencumbered by the past, the people of Chicago were free to chart a new and fantastically successful course. A similar opportunity awaits you.

Set aside what you know about marketing, it is simply a barrier to a new and better future. Like the people of Chicago, you may discover the accumulations of the last thirty years are only slowing you down. Leave them behind, turn the page, and let the fire begin.

ⁱ <http://www.chocagoohs.org/fire/conflag/> January 16, 2005

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ci.chi.il.us/landmarks/s/sitechicagofire.html> January 16, 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.chicagooohs.org/fire/witnesses/> January 16, 2005