

As first published in AMEX Open Forum
April 15, 2009

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I spent almost 10 years working in Benin, West Africa. As I quickly learned, it was a storytelling culture. But just a soon, I was told by my language coach that a good story is not necessarily based on whether it's true or not. A legend can be propagated because people often accept it without substantiation. As in any culture, myths were so prevalent in Africa and it was difficult to discern fact from fiction (especially as an outsider). In our business world, there are probably a hundred marketing myths that small business owners hear each day as well. So let's pick 5 popular marketing myths and test their truthfulness.



MYTH 1: "You gotta spend money to make money."

The truth is that if you are not investing, you'll never claim ROI. If I call my broker and say "how's that stock of mine doing that I never bought?" he'd consider me a fool for expecting any returns. You spend money on inventory, software, and of course payroll in hopes that it will turn a profit. Why would you expect strong marketing results without putting some serious resources behind your efforts? However, the claim of having to spend massive amounts of marketing cash has been shattered by the host of affordable and sometimes, FREE marketing tools available. And with the rise of social media, you can engage in interactive marketing so that you trade in that cash outlay of expenses for time cultivating relationships in a variety of online forums.

MYTH 2: "All the old ways of advertising are gone. Everything is online now."

There are many in my field saying that traditional methods of marketing are out. Newspapers are dying. Phone books get recycled more than used. But you should probably give the boot to anybody on your marketing team with a dogmatic stance against conventional marketing methods. Why? Because it's demonstrating that their plan is based solely on trendy copycat marketing. Your marketing decisions have to be first based on who you are targeting. If your target market is not online, then direct mail may be the most effective reach. And sometimes, even for guys like me who spend hours a day on Facebook and Twitter, even the most simplistic methodology can make the connection from my need to your solution. The picture above was taken at the intersection near my house. I noticed it because my wife and I were wondering where we might find information about girls' summer softball for our oldest daughter. A few hours later, we had her registered. All from a simple sign.

MYTH 3: "Build it and they will come." (your website that is)

A colleague of mine recently shared a story about a client that launched his first website last year and was disappointed that after 3 months he wasn't getting more than one or two hits a day. Constructing a website is like building a house right in the middle of a busy neighborhood, located

in a crowded subdivision and in a major city. You will know it's there, but without some effort on your part, it will continue to exist in anonymity. Drive people to your site by inviting them. Targeted online advertising can connect your site to the consumer's needs. Blogging and online press releases continue to provide fresh content that grows your website traffic. Announce that a special coupon can be found on your website instead of giving it to them in a newspaper. Combine the efforts of permission-based email marketing to link people's inbox to your website. No, they are not going to come simply because you created a domain name. Practice hospitality and invite them.

MYTH 4: "When we make some more money, we'll spend money on marketing."

While that makes practical sense, would you consider building your dream house that way? While you might get out there on your own and throw some bricks and mortar together, your work will soon come to a screeching halt because you are not well organized in the beginning. A well-built home starts with an architect. When it comes to marketing, you need to launch on a strong foundation. Affordable marketing planning software is available. Get a coach to help as well.

MYTH 5: "Once I get a customer to try my product, they'll never go anywhere else."

The marketing consumer is very finicky and I would not put much confidence in loyalty if it is only based on a few transactions. It can be true that you can find a local auto repair shop that does a great job and you'll be hooked for life (I've heard people feel this way about toilet paper, but I'm not sure if that's just a myth?) But also consider how fickle you are with the different brands you personally use. My Dad always drove a Chevy until one day he pulled up in a new Dodge truck (explanation: "they were offering a great deal"). You must engage your loyal clientele with continued extraordinary service, personalization and perhaps a loyalty reward system.

The truth is that there are many falsehoods in marketing. But there are just as many false beliefs that mask the truth that need to be faced. When you hear one of these popular myths, be sure and test it for fact or fiction.

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