



Are you for Real? Effective Marketing in the Internet Age

By Kathryn Nudelman

It's been a buzzword in the online world for a while. Recently, I'm hearing it discussed in the corporate world, and occasionally I'm seeing it in print in places other than Wired Magazine. For years I've watched non-profits overlook it without realizing it is one of their greatest natural assets for fundraising. The word is authenticity and it's the unmistakable voice of modern marketing.

The web's impact on our decision-making styles has made authenticity an increasingly necessary part of effective messaging in the real world, too. Simply put, the Internet has enabled us to become informed faster than ever. As a result of being better informed, we're also better at knowing when we're being misled. Whether we get them from print, TV, radio or in person, people are only a click away from checking up on suspicious-sounding pitches.

Before we could connect with our friends, news anchors, and the Library of Congress at the drop of a hat, we were somewhat more beholden to advertisers for information that could make or break our decision to buy in (to anything). But the web turned the tables pretty quickly by giving consumers the same if not greater access to information than that of the marketers. And even more important than access to static information, the web gave us access to other people, and other people's dynamic ideas. This matters – no, it's pivotal – because it means that markets have evolved from corporate monologs and sound bites into conversations being had by real people. *People*, not demographics and statistics and targets. When people connect, they share experiences and ideas they believe in, things they are passionate about. Things that are constantly evolving. They share relevant knowledge at blinding speed. And they do it in a human-sounding voice. Not in sterile, commercial jargon. If companies want to stay in the game, they have to get real; people are becoming too savvy to buy the alternative.

Authenticity sounds genuine and sincere, because it is. You can't fake it, at least not in the long run. It's about telling the truth out of respect for your customers. They are intelligent and resourceful, and they won't take long to figure out how well you deliver on your word. But know the difference between honesty and unflattering transparency. The art is shedding light on the whole truth, and then highlighting the best parts. You don't have to

talk about your skeletons, just leave the closet door unlocked. Being authentic in your approach involves raising awareness about benefits over manufacturing interest or intentionally hiding the parts that aren't glamorous. When you put the right offer in front of the right person, you don't need gimmicks or cheesy hooks to make the sale.

Being a good marketer doesn't take an advanced degree. It takes understanding that marketing is about identifying and sharing ideas with others who will reap the benefit. Here are a few tips for getting started:

1. Speak and write like a person, not like a marketer.
2. Lots of slang, poor spelling and grammar don't make you sound authentic. They make you sound like a bozo. So have fun, use humor, be you. But be articulate. Use grammar and spell check, and a good editor.
3. Focus on developing awareness rather than inventing interest. Good products and services are interesting on their own. Your job is to let the right people know how much it costs and where they can get it.
4. Be passionate. Isn't that why you're involved in the first place?

Being authentic won't change your bottom line overnight. It won't save your cookies if your business model is broken. But it *can* enable you to connect in a more meaningful way with your customers. And just imagine what the world would look like if we all had a little more meaning in our day to day.

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