




Guest column (Green Bay Press Gazette): How to fail in business in 2010

BY DANA VANDEN HEUVEL • JANUARY 1, 2010

Congratulations! Your business made it through 2009, one of the toughest years since the Depression , and now you're ready to accelerate into the rebound. After all, optimism is one of the hallmark traits of most successful business people. We know that we can't sell in the past and believe that the best lies ahead of us.

There are a few things that can, if you do them, hinder your progress immeasurably, virtually sealing your demise in the New Year. If you do these things, failure is all but assured. However, if you heed this advice and act positively in the other direction, your success is all but guaranteed.

Here are six of the most common marketing decisions that businesses make to seal their fate:

- **Wait for customers to find you:** You need to put together a comprehensive monthly plan that you execute consistently to put your name in front of the people that you want to do business with. They aren't coming until you ask them to.
- **Start and stop marketing:** Marketing isn't something that you do only when your numbers dive. Marketing is cumulative. It builds on itself and builds your business as you market more and market consistently. The constant speeding and slowing will give you marketing-whiplash. Keep it steady.
- **Don't collect customer e-mails:** This detail is overlooked by countless businesses, and it's to their own detriment. The demise of e-mail has been greatly exaggerated; it is still one of the most effective marketing tools in your arsenal . The ability to communicate to your customer base instantly, at virtually no cost, is still a revolutionary idea.
- **All tactics and no strategy:** Not planning to market means you're planning to fail. Create a marketing calendar, stick to it, execute your strategy every month and watch your business grow. Next year, make a few changes and do it all over again.
- **Don't differentiate yourself:** Everyone goes into business for a different reason, and I'm willing to bet that you didn't do it to copy what your competitor down the street was doing. Nevertheless, most people are woefully behind in explaining their true distinction to prospective customers. Take some time and polish your "elevator pitch" so that everyone who asks will know why you're unique and valuable.
- **Don't update your Web site :** Having a Web site is like having a pulse. If you don't, you're dead. Having an outdated Web site reflects poorly on your business and is costing you new customers every day as people are trying to satisfy wants that could lead them to doing business with you. Take a look at your Web site through your customers' eyes (ask them what they think of your site as well) and do a refresh for the new year.

Now is your chance to make 2010 the year that you accelerate out of a slump, rev up the rebound and make the best marketing decisions for your business.

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