

Posi-dubitably, Abso-quivocally Outrageous Marketing

By T Scott Gross

Would you like to turn up the volume on your marketing? How about a neat idea or two for leveraging the marketing that you are already doing? Well, it's not all that complicated. It just takes a little creativity and a healthy appetite for risk. If you can stand the heat, you'll love cookin' up a good dose of Positively Outrageous Marketing.

There are four characteristics of POS Marketing but, as you might guess, like it's cousin Positively Outrageous Service, surprise is a key ingredient.

One test of Positively Outrageous Service is that if you cannot tell where service stops and marketing begins, that's probably POS. The idea behind POS is to create positive, compelling word of mouth through surprising, out of proportion customer service. Apply the same rule to marketing and what do you get? Marketing that is itself talked about. If you can get customers to talk about your marketing, son, you've done gone and done something powerful.

The test for POS Marketing is this: Is it newsworthy? Answer 'yes' and your on the right track.

Four Points...

... and the first one is fun!

We found that if you can create programs that: are fun, involve the product, get people to the property, and this is a big one, do something good for others, you'll have a knock-down marketing event.

Fun is a key element of Positively Outrageous Marketing. We aren't the only ones who have discovered that the element of fun amplifies any marketing effort.

From the file I bring you an ad from Dick's Last Resort in San Antonio. Before we go further, take notice of the company name.. Dick's Last Resort. Tells you right up front that this is going to be a good time. In fact, the name is also a warning. It lets you know from the git go that if you are feeling grumpy to keep your grouchy backside outside!

The ad that caught my attention is headlined "Elvis Lives" and dares the reader to "come see for your self" as they celebrate his sixty-first birthday and notes that if you enter the Elvis karaoke contest and dress the part you earn 'suck-up points.'

We're talking pure, unadulterated f-u-n. Nothing exotic. Nothing fancy. Just goffin off.

And guess what... people like that.

In a world that is far too serious a little fun draws a lot of attention.

Is any idea too corny? Not if your name is Insurance Man AKA Dennis Savage of Springfield, Oregon. I'm holding one of Dennis' cards which proclaims that his policy holders are "protected by Insurance Man." And yes, there is an Insurance Man costume. Leotard, cape, and I hate to say what else. But in an area with nearly fifty competing agents, standing out is the secret to survival and a caped insurance crusader tends to stand out!

At Borders Bookstore in Austin, we spotted an outline of a body neatly chalked on the floor just in front of a sales section featuring, you guessed it, murder mysteries.

Next to fun, there is nothing like a good story to grab your customer. I guarantee you that if you share any part of this book with a friend or co-worker, it will be a story. No matter how hard I try to be serious when I go out to speak people who have heard me make a point of saying, "be sure to tell the Bubba story."

Why? Because when you hear a good story you become a part of the action. You put yourself in the place of the hero or maybe you just share the word picture so clearly the story becomes real.

The Wall Street Journal reported a hugely successful ad campaign by HIP, Health Insurance Plan of Greater New York, that used humorous stories to capture the viewer. Such things as a construction worker getting whacked by a board, a woman leaping over a tennis net to congratulate her opponent only to trip and tumble, and a passerby who is about to get clobbered by a falling piano were used to tickle funny bones while watching commercials about broken bones. Why the interest? Humor and stories.

Is there a better example than the serialized commercials for Brim? You remember the two middle-aged single neighbors who turn borrowed instant coffee into a relationship that seemed to last forever. Well, consumers apparently were glued to their sets waiting with each new commercial for the next turn in the relationship.

Point two... involve the product

In Bunol, Spain we find the ultimate example in the annual La Tomatina, which is probably the world's largest food fight. And do they attract a crowd? Over a half million line the streets as huge trucks haul millions of tomatoes to the waiting crowds.

The vegetable equivalent of the running of the bulls held in Pamplona, La Tomatina puts fun what soon amount to tomato puree into the streets. Some wear goggles and helmets but most of the crowd wears old t-shirts and cut-off jeans as they pummel friend and stranger with soft, red tomatoes.

Shopkeepers hose down participants which lessens the sting of citric acid from the tomatoes. After the event, fire hoses wash the tomatoes into the storm sewers while participants head to public showers. The citric acid acts as a cleaning agent so the event leaves the streets and buildings sparkling.

The nice lady from the March of Dimes asked if we would help sponsor the big annual event. What she had in mind was a couple of hundred bucks to help provide t-shirts for the participants. Of course, we would get our logo printed on the shirts. And, of course, I said, "no." She was shocked. "You sponsor everything," implying that she couldn't imagine me turning away such a worthy cause a March of Dimes.

"Yes, M'am. But not this. You want me to spend a couple-a-hundred bucks to encourage people to walk on the other side of town. Now, I'd be delighted to play, but this isn't it.

"If you're willing to start and end the march at my store, I'll play in a big way. First, I will give everyone who starts the march a hot, honey butter biscuit.' It's my theory that all good marketing is aimed at getting trial. If you have a great product and people try it, you've probably won a customer. So I like to focus all my marketing on encouraging trial.

"Not only that, but when the folks return, I'll give them a cold cup of tea." Here we were playing to my cheap side. There is absolutely nothing in tea. It is the cheapest thing a restaurateur can serve. Heck, if you have high iron content in your water, you don't even have to put the tea in the tea!

"Annd," I said, upping the ante another notch, "I'll have the Chicken Man lead the march!"

"You can do that?" she exclaimed.

"Lady, I know him personally!"

Now I should probably describe this suit even though there is no big point to be made.

It featured green knee socks, yellow baggy shorts, an orange top and white, custom fur wings. Are you getting a picture here? There was a rubber beak, wrap-around mirrored sunglasses and a white hard hat

on which we had had stuffed and mounted a real chicken! As chicken suits go, this one was truly awesome! In fact, when we sold the store a couple of years ago, we kept the suit. Melanie likes me to wear it around the house every now and then!

But the question is this: "If you were the photographer for the local paper, what picture would you take? Several hundred people in look-alike t-shirts or a guy with a chicken on his head?"

I rest my case!

Now the march takes about two hours. We started it about nine-thirty. What time do these tired, hungry folks get back to my store? Hint: eleven-thirty is not the right answer!

Get 'em to your property...

If the goal of marketing is to get trial, then it just follows that you want to hold as many marketing events as possible on your turf. At the very least make folks come to your place to register or pick up prizes. Best of all though, is to get them to your property no matter what.

(Me and our German Shepherd, Bailey, just moved to the office porch. We're having a thunderstorm and the Boo Meister likes to stick her nose where the rain runs off of the roof!)

Ever been to Lund, Nevada? No? Well neither have many others. For you and me, that's not a problem but if you are trying to run a business in that tiny town you might be looking for a way to attract a crowd and why not with the Silver State Classic Challenge, a road race open to the general public and run on a state highway?

Average people race average cars in this anything-but-average race where in the open class so-called average speeds can average 186.73mph, faster than the 147.956 record average for the Indy 500. You could sign up if you wanted. Anything that rolls is pretty much OK. How about a 1989 Ford Tuarus or a 1965 Olds Cutlass? These are but two of recent entrants.

The point? If you are going to produce a POS event, for goodness sake, get 'em to your property, involve your product and have a good time. If there is a formula for capturing attention that pretty much is the recipe. Of course, if you really want to hit a home run, add one final ingredient: do something good for others.

Doing Good... for Everyone!

Personally, I can't imagine a POS Marketing event that didn't involve this final element, doing something good for others. Why? Because I'm a good guy? I'd like to think that has something to do with it but let's assume the worst, that I am a mean, selfish, capitalist pig. Then what would I do? Same thing!

When your promotions involve doing good for others a magical thing happens: suddenly you have a partner who has a vested interest in the success of your promotion. To add frosting to the cake, you are perceived as being a community supporter.

I can't tell you how many times we've had people tell us that they were glad we offered good product. Why? "Because of the good things you do in the community, we'd have to eat here even if it wasn't all that good!"

Imagination...

The one thing you need for Positively Outrageous Marketing is imagination. That, and the willingness to take a risk and perhaps crash and burn from time to time.

To create an idea for Positively Outrageous Marketing, practice this: take two or more ordinary ideas and smooch them together.

* We received a card from Sergio Tardio announcing that the former Chef Concierge of the Ritz Carlton, St Louis had moved his whisk to the Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows. Simple, inexpensive, creative. Not really POS Marketing but unusual so I mention it here. Hey! When was the last time you received an announcement like that?

* Marx Gibson, General Manager of The Herald-News in Joliett, IL was reading Positively Outrageous Service while flying home on Southwest Airlines. The napping woman who was sitting beside him awoke and noticed what he was reading. 'Turned out she was a SWA employee and quickly pointed out that POS was 'their service secret.'

If it's good enough for SWA, it might work for a newspaper went Gibsons line of reasoning so he started dog-earring pages and soon had cooked up a POS idea or two of his own.

The headline reads: Herald-News Boss: This Guy Delivers.... On Your Street: Look for Marx Gibson, delivering your paper, listening to your comments and complaints. The lead sentence reads "Tell it to da boss."

Gibson started riding with route carriers helping them deliver papers and knocking on doors while he was at it. ..."During our publicized walks through the neighborhoods, people gave us bags of fresh corn, invited us in for iced tea, handed several days worth of marked up newspapers to me, took our photos and generally told us how much they appreciated the fact that the boss came to their door."

Simple, elegant, inexpensive, and dead on POS!

* Big Dave Ostrander of, naturally, Big Dave's Pizza & Subs in Oscoda, MI took a page right out of the original Positively Outrageous Service. Dave surprises customers with the following letter that is attached to orders...whenever Dave feels like it!

Dear Friends:

Old friends are essential in any business. Everyone at Big Dave's is committed to treating our guests like family. We feel that is one of the reasons we've carried on for the past twenty years. It's awkward to charge guests for a good time so... **today is your lucky day.** This entire order is **FREE!** In order to make this day possible, all of our staff is voluntarily working for free. Please treat them generously. Please feel free to tell your friends. Thanks for the opportunity to serve you.

Big Dave Ostrander and Crew

* Here's one I read about. Now you're reading about it!

Kaufman & Broad Home Corp. decided that when it comes to creativity, their employees were tops. To take advantage of this natural trove of talent, they gave each employee, all 1200 of them, a T-shirt with the company logo and challenged them to see how much publicity they could legally get.

How did they do? Well, workers jumped out of planes, stopped rush hour traffic by parading en mass across a freeway overpass and even dressed an elephant in an appropriately sized version of the shirt.

What do you think your employees would do if similarly challenged? Try it!

* In the mail bag we found a Mercedes emblem with an offer to see the rest of the vehicle. What followed was a unique invitation to preview a new All-Activity Vehicle by Mercedes. This is the kind of marketing that, while expensive, certainly gets your attention. And while it's true that I drive a plain Jane Ford pick-up and an Explorer with a grill guard, I did keep the Mercedes emblem. You just never know!

* We were invited to present Positively Outrageous Service to the good folks in Baton Rouge. To grab the attention of local executives they sent two clever versions of the invitation. One was an empty brown

lunch bag imprinted with this simple message: "Who Says There's No Such Thing As A Free Lunch?" The other mailing included a wallet that contained tickets to the event and a card that promised so many money-making ideas that they would be needing another wallet. Pretty clever! Pretty POS!

* Here's a perfect example of POS Marketing. When the World Cup of soccer tournament came to Washington, DC, the folks at Galileo restaurant prepared theme meals to honor the contestants. They prepared an Italian menu one day, Norwegian the next and followed that with Bolivian food. They donated 20% of sales to the American Diabetes Association (\$900) and was swamped with publicity.

Imagine what such exposure would have cost if you could buy it. At \$900 the event was a bargain. plus it did something good for others. Beat that!

What could you do that would qualify as Positively Outrageous Marketing? Could you put two disparate ideas in a head-on collision and create something special? Could you take a run -of-the-mill idea that 'everyone' in the industry does and put a new twist on it?

Of course you can! It just takes guts, imagination, and a touch of positively outrageousness!

T. Scott Gross is the author of *Positively Outrageous Service*, a management classic.
www.tscottgross.com copyright T. Scott Gross 2007