

*Does Your
Company Need an*

EXTREME

**Messaging
Makeover!**

By David M. Mastovich

Have you ever driven past a billboard that would cause an accident if anyone actually read the whole thing? Or wished that a salesperson would stop blabbering about how perfect their product or service is? Worse yet, have you ever sat through a presentation that features a bunch of PowerPoint slides being read to you by the speaker? The advertiser, salesperson and speaker all missed the opportunity to reach and influence their target audiences. Time and money are wasted. Productivity suffers. It's probably time for an Extreme Messaging Makeover.

FIVE WAYS TO ACHIEVE YOUR EXTREME MESSAGING MAKEOVER

1. Focus on One Big Idea

We're bombarded with messages from the time we wake up until we crash at the end of a long day. We can't afford to spend more time processing information unless we are sure we need it. We remember creative messages that are memorable and make an emotional impact. We relate to them and they are focused on one main idea. Think about ads or slogans that you probably couldn't forget if you wanted to...

- *Can You Hear Me Now?*
- *Don't Leave Home Without It.*
- *Got Milk?*

Try to remember the last time a salesperson made just the right pitch. Or you thoroughly enjoyed a presentation or speaker. The message was focused on you and on one big idea that you still remember today. The next time you are creating an ad, making a sales pitch, preparing for a presentation, or writing a memo, improve your message by asking yourself: What's the Big Idea?

2. Tell Your Story by Telling Stories

Stories resonate and help us relate to others. We remember vivid details of stories told when we were kids. The most influential speakers tell memorable stories that stir multiple emotions. The most successful advertising campaigns use storytelling to make a lasting impact. The best media coverage is created by compelling stories.

When presenting to a group, internally or externally, take your messaging to another level with meaningful and memorable stories. You might find that a story you think is no big deal will be enjoyed by your audience.

Build your company's brand by telling multiple stories that become your key message points, convey your real story and create the image you deserve. Tell your company's story in a way that focuses on your key target audiences. Make it about them and their wants and needs.

Instead of sending boring press releases that end up ignored by the media, tell interesting, real life stories that people will want to read and hear. Then, the media can be your conduit to tell your story.

3. Use Startling Stats, Numbered Lists and Acronyms

People tend to remember memorable facts or numbers rather than theories or abstract ideas. Beginning with a relevant fact or statistic can be an effective way to grab the audience's attention and provide

them with an easy to remember point. Trident famously used the phrase "four out of five dentists surveyed would recommend sugarless gum to their patients who chew gum" in its advertising for decades. Why? It was a startling statistic that made a memorable impact. Trident provided a key takeaway that gained credibility with their key target audiences.

We also remember numbered lists better than a simple listing of facts. If you number points in accordance to importance or relevance, your audience will at least remember the top few points and maybe more. Think back to when a speaker used this technique and said they were going to talk about three major points. Once they said the first two, you were waiting for the third one. After the presentation, you probably even tried to remember the three main points to tell others who were not at the presentation.

Acronyms and abbreviations are also an effective way to help your audience remember things they might not normally retain. Within many organizations and industries, this practice is so popular that a maze of acronyms can actually lead to confusion. When that happens, you might find a CQI team is developed to focus on PI and maximizing ROI to reduce stress and avoid increased visits to doctors in the company's PPO or HMO... so try not to overuse this tactic.

4. Get Them to Feel Something

Your messaging must make an emotional impact with your target audience. They have to feel something.

When we listen to a political candidate, entertainer, coach, religious leader or rock star, we typically feel something. We are emotionally tied to the subject and the speaker. These communicators know how to stir emotions and engage their audiences.

While you might not see yourself as a rock star speaker or your message to the level of a coach or politician, you still need to think about how you can make an emotional impact on your audience. Don't fall back on the same old corporate speak. Do you touch on emotions like excitement, fear, happiness or sadness? If not, you are reducing the likelihood of your message resonating and being remembered for more than a brief time.

Touch emotions to capture people's attention. Focus on what the audience stands to lose as well as what they stand to gain. Put the message in their terms and focus on the impact on them, positive or negative.

5. Tell the Truth

Most marketers have heard the phrase 'Truth in Advertising' and there's even a

spoof on YouTube about the lack thereof. The term 'Spin Doctor' pretty much covers the perception of Truth in PR. And as far as Sales, nobody likes to be sold, right?

As our parents and kindergarten teachers taught us, telling the truth is the ethical way to go. It is also the practical approach.

Telling the truth is essential to successful Public Relations. Pick your favorite media gaffe that resulted from a public figure being less than truthful. 'The Media' will find and report contradictions and the story can potentially reach the masses within minutes online. If you hide behind a 'no comment' or offer a less than truthful response, you will be perceived negatively when the reporter eventually does break the story (and someone will).

With regard to Truth in Sales, think about how you feel when a salesperson goes on and on. You probably wish they would shut up and listen to what you are saying so you can tell them what you want. Salespeople need to listen, ask probing questions and match needs based on the strengths of their product or service. Admit weaknesses early because the prospect will usually figure out that your product isn't perfect. Focus on true strengths and leave the hyperbole to your competitors.

Truth in Advertising does exist and the winning companies adhere to it. Truth in PR must exist or you and your company will lose credibility. Truth in Sales will help you stand out from the competition and ultimately lead to more business for your company.

Your Extreme Messaging Makeover will make a difference for you and your organization. Follow these strategies and make it happen!

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With a core philosophy of integrated marketing, MASSolutions focuses on improving the bottom line for clients through creative selling, messaging and PR solutions. In his recent book, "Get Where You Want To Go: How to Achieve Personal and Professional Growth Through Marketing, Selling and Story Telling," Mastovich offers strategies to improve sales and generate new customers; management and leadership approaches; and creative marketing, PR and communications ideas. For more information, please visit massolutions.biz.