



Throw Out the Crap

Build on what works, and chuck what doesn't

When was the last time you deliberately stopped doing something in your business? Not something you "just kinda stopped doing" but something that you looked at, said "this is not working," and thus stopped doing?

For most of you that answer will be "never;" especially if it was something connected to your marketing and really especially if it is something that you spent money on.

We hate to waste money. That's a good thing--not wanting to waste money. Totally admirable and smart in business. Unfortunately, we don't always see that what we're doing is wasting money. In the stock market, one of the main faults of non-professional investors is not selling losers soon enough. We buy a stock, it goes up a bit and we get excited, then it goes down and we start telling ourselves that it will turn around--we don't sell. We don't sell even when that stock loses 50% of its value! We ride that pig right into the ground.

We do the same thing with our marketing (and other business things). Maybe you bought an ad in a local creative directory and you get either no calls or only calls for really cheap projects. The next year the rep tells you that you need to stick it out, offers you a deal, and you sign up again. Or maybe you bought an enhanced listing on portfolios.com (a dog of an online creative directory, not that I mean to insult dogs) and again you keep buying it every year, even though you've never gotten a project from it. Or perhaps you send tiny postcards that you "designed" yourself (those quotes are deliberate--you are not a designer!) to save money, but your sales have stayed flat. Or you keep building, "designing," and maintaining your business' website (again "to save money") and spend hours every time you do an update recoding and "fixing" the thing.

All of these are not steps which save you money but rather which waste your money. You're losing money while your "fixing" your website. You're wasting money buying ads your targets won't see. You're really wasting money when you make your own promos (with very, very, have-I-mentioned-very, rare exceptions).

A better idea is to take time every year and review your marketing plan and its effects. I think once a year is a good interval--you do have to give things time to work, but you don't want to "ride the pig." So, once a year, look at your tools and see what response they have been getting. How many visitors are coming to your site? Is it trending up? Do you get more hits after your mailers go out? What about calls? How many people are clicking through your emails to your site? Are people spending more or less time at your site once they're there? Does your book get a good reaction when you show it? Etc. When you find something that isn't working, chuck it (at least in its current form). Yes, even if you have spent money on it already--don't go throwing good money after bad, as they say.

One big step to take on this path is to train yourself to ask every single person who contacts you "How did you hear about [insert your biz name here]?" Tape it to your phone if you need to, or your monitor. And make a note of the answer. This is a good way to track what tools are working. Sure, you'll get a lot of "I dunno...I've known about your work for a while" kinds of answers, but you'll also get enough of "I got your mailers and saw your site" kinds to get a feel for trends.

One important thing to keep in mind, however: don't chuck something because it isn't perfect. Look at the trends. If you were hoping to get 1000 hits on your website for each mailer you sent but you didn't, that might not be a good enough reason to chuck the mailers. Maybe you got 200 after the first mailer, 250 after the second, 275 after the third, and 450 after the fourth one. The trend is upwards and while you didn't hit your goal, maybe it was because your goal wasn't reasonable. That increasing number is a good sign--give it some more until it plateaus and starts to drop before you chuck that mailer campaign.

The other side of that is equally true: if you do something, even if only on a whim, and it results in a positive response, keep doing that! I just spoke to a client who sent out email to a very targeted list of potential clients to celebrate a lesser-known holiday (the targets would know the holiday, but if I had gotten it, I wouldn't have). They got all sorts of positive comments from the targets. Bingo! I told 'em to keep at it (which they had already wisely thought of doing). I don't care how silly or odd or "not in the books" the thing is. If it works, do it.

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