



And the Cobbler's Son Goes Unshod...

I got an email the other day. It was from one of my brothers, who is a freelance graphic designer for television. He's also interested in expanding into illustration. He had designed a postcard he was thinking about sending as a promo, and he wanted my opinion. Makes sense considering what I do for a living. I said I'd be happy to take a look.

The front of the card was composed of many squares with each one containing a sample of his work. Most of the squares were full of station logos and the like, but two or three had more traditional illustrations. One square near the center had his company name in it and his web address was tucked along the edge of the card. He didn't send me a jpeg of the back of the card.

I immediately noticed several things, and brought them to his attention:

1. The back of the card had to have his company name and full contact info clearly laid out or else the front needed changes. While the company name and web address were available on the front, they were both hard to find and, especially with postcards, the important information needs to be clear and easily accessible.

2. There should also be a call to action of some sort on the back. Even something as simple as "call 404.555.1212 for our demo reel" is better than nothing.

3. The mix of images on the front was confusing. Did he do TV or what? Those three illustrations, as good as they were, were really distracting from the strength of the graphics shown. It was a mixed message and mixed marketing messages are a bad thing.

4. The postcard and his website didn't go together. That is, there was no consistency in branding. Even the way he had rendered his company name was different on the card than on his site (same font, though).

When I told him these things, he got defensive. "Yes," he said, "the back of the card has all the contact information."

"Good. You still might want to make your company name a bit clearer on the front, but it's not terrible as it is. What about a call to action?"

He sighed, "I hate that. It makes me feel like I'm selling."

"You are. That's the whole point."

"Yeah, I guess, but I don't think I have to do it in an obvious way. These people will know what this postcard is for."

"But," I replied, "what is it for? Why are you sending this card? What are you trying to accomplish? And why do you have illustrations on it?"

He answered that he just wanted a generic postcard to send to a small group of mostly TV clients to remind them that he was around, that he had moved back to Atlanta and that he was

available if they needed him. As for the illustrations, those were there to show clients that he could do work like that as well.

When I asked him whether TV stations would ever be interested in buying illustrative work of that nature, he agreed that they wouldn't, but he wanted to have the work there in case someone got interested for some other project, and he might send the card to a couple of people who might be interested in maybe buying that kind of work.

Alarm bells went off in my head. "Hoo boy," I thought, "here's my own brother, and he doesn't really have a clue about how to market himself. He's doing exactly what one shouldn't do, and making almost all the mistakes creatives make when they start marketing themselves."

In an attempt to help, I explained that a postcard isn't worth the paper it's printed on unless it's part of a whole marketing effort. He was going about the process backwards and, in my opinion, he was wasting his time, efforts, and money on this card. He needed to do the following before he did anything about a postcard:

1. Determine what it is he was trying to sell. If it's TV graphics and traditional illustration, then those were two very different things and they should be kept separate. Yes, you can do them both, but don't try to slop them together.

2. Make a list of specific and concrete goals for a specific time period. Write them down—things like, "In the next calendar year, generate \$100K in TV graphics fees" and "generate \$35K in illustration fees" and "spend 25% of my time working on personal projects." The goals provide the framework for the next 2 steps and help determine how to budget time and money.

3. Determine the targets for his marketing. For each "item" he's selling, he needs to create lists of potential clients (and current ones, of course).

4. Determine how he can best reach those targets over a specific period of time. Marketing is not a one-shot deal. It's relationship-building. Most people call that a "campaign." So he needs to develop a campaign for his TV graphics biz and one for his illustrations. A postcard is a fine tool in a campaign, but it's only one tool and by itself it's not effective.

Put all of those steps together, flesh them out, and, voilà, a marketing plan is born.

Marketing plans are absolutely necessary for any creative professional who is in business for him/herself. My brother, just like most freelance creative professionals, never even thought about developing one. Not having one means that you'll waste money and time on uncoordinated efforts and usually have that feeling that you don't really know what you're doing or why you're bothering. If you have a plan, then each step is clear and the goals are defined. You'll know if something fits in your plan, or if it's just a waste. You'll also spend less time overall on your marketing, but have much better results.