

The background of the entire page is a large, dense crowd of people, rendered in a monochromatic blue and white color scheme. The crowd is out of focus, creating a sense of a vast, anonymous group. In the foreground, three individuals are clearly visible: a man on the left in a dark suit and light blue tie, a woman in the center with short brown hair wearing a purple shirt under a dark jacket, and a woman on the right with long dark hair wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt. They appear to be walking through the crowd.

Is SELF- EMPLOYMENT *for* YOU?

ANYONE *can start a business...*
only FEW *can SUSTAIN a business.*

PAUL E. CASEY

(2,056 words)

Are you thinking about taking the plunge into the world of self-employment? The following excerpt on “Marketing” is from the book, “Is Self-Employment for You?” This book goes beyond the ABC’s of how to write a business plan but examines the potential entrepreneur’s emotional readiness and personality traits that ultimately make the difference between success and failure. “Is Self-Employment for You?” Author Paul Casey has been successfully sustaining his communications business for over fifteen years. The book costs \$15.95 and can be purchased by visiting Amazon.com and inputting ,Is Self-Employment for You?

MARKETING YOUR START UP BUSINESS

By Paul Casey

I believe the number one reason that most businesses fail is that their owners do not understand marketing. If, as they say, "A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing," then the business owner who does not understand marketing is the one who knows just enough to be dangerous.

When it comes to marketing, many business owners simply assume that “anyone can do it.” Often, they have no idea how to market or promote their enterprise. Successful marketing involves much more than just placing an ad in the local newspaper. And while you don’t need a huge budget to advertise your product or service, it helps if you have an understanding of the basic principles of marketing.

There is no one single approach to marketing that will work for all types of businesses. But there are some basic principles for successful marketing. Understanding these principles will help you to promote your business more effectively. The four key principles are **consistency, simplicity, target, and execution**.

CONSISTENCY

Many businesses believe that a huge advertising budget is necessary to “get the word out,” or they think it is essential to “brand” their products or services. They spend thousands of dollars on super-creative ad campaigns when a small, well-thought-out, and *consistent* marketing campaign will be much more effective. In whatever market you choose, you must *establish a consistent presence* for your business. *A long-term, consistent approach to marketing is much more cost-effective and will achieve a greater impact for your business than a huge, all-or-nothing one-time ad campaign.*

The trick is to find the right marketing medium for your business. I have seen many companies bounce around from one medium to another, unable to find the "one that works"—because they never stick with one medium long enough to see consistent results from it. For example, they might start out with direct mail. If they don't get an enormous response to their first mailing, they conclude that direct mail doesn't work. So they switch to running a newspaper ad. After several weeks, the ad still hasn't produced the response they wanted, so they cancel it. Then they might try a radio commercial. Once more, the medium doesn't produce as much of a response as they expected, so they decide that radio doesn't work.

You see the problem? People who don't understand marketing often blame the medium if it doesn't meet their expectations. It's like blaming the messenger for delivering bad news. All of the above mediums work, including radio. There are over 11,000 commercial radio stations in the United States that are supported solely by advertising.

Every marketing medium works for *somebody*. It's up to you to figure out which

medium (or mediums) will work best for you and stick with them. You must achieve *consistency* with your medium before you can effectively measure its results. Let's say you are an accountant and you want to send out a direct mail piece, notifying the community of your services. It's obvious that a good direct mail house can help you to create an effective mailing piece, and to determine your target audience based on the services you offer. What isn't so obvious is the *frequency* that you should use for this or any other medium.

Never make a judgement on whether or not a certain medium works based on a frequency of one. If you send out one mailing and receive little response, *send it out again!* Decide at the beginning of the process how many times you will use a certain medium, and stick to that frequency.

For example, you may decide to send out the direct mail piece once a month, or once every other month. I believe that a six-month to one-year trial period is the minimum required before you can make an intelligent judgement as to whether or not your direct mail piece is working.

SIMPLICITY

We've all heard the quote: "*Keep it simple, stupid!*" No truer words were ever spoken or written, particularly when it comes to marketing.

Start with a simple name for your business that tells people *exactly* what your company does. If you have a slogan, it should sum up your services and or target audience in a few simple words. Here are some good examples:

- Safeguard Business Accounting: "Meeting the Needs of Small Businesses."
- Casey Communications Inc. "Broadcast and Print: Creative, Production, &

Placement.”

- Oakbrook Dry Cleaning: “In by 8, out by 5.”

This may seem perfectly obvious, but a surprising number of businesses fail to follow this basic marketing rule. Getting the name of your business right is the most important marketing decision that you will ever make.

Here's another example of two companies that provide the exact same service. One company name tells you exactly what they do. The other does not.

- *"Guardian Security Systems: Commercial Access Systems."*
- *"Dolphin Technology Inc."*

Guardian Security Systems declares in its name exactly what it does. The company even states in its headline that they serve commercial clients. On the other hand, one might assume from its name that Dolphin Technology is a high-tech oceanography research firm. Perhaps they produce locating devices that can be attached to dolphins to monitor their migration patterns. You would never guess from their name that they also specialize in security software.

Even the logic of the name "Dolphin Technology" is fuzzy. What do dolphins have to do with providing security for computer networks? At least the name "Guardian Security Systems" gives you a clear metaphor. Their software product will serve as a guardian for your network, thus preventing hackers and spammers from breaking into it.

When people who do not understand marketing are evaluating the effectiveness of an advertising medium, the first question they often ask is, “How many calls did you get from the advertisement?” The more pertinent question to ask is “How many *qualified* calls did you get from the advertisement?” In other words, how many calls did you get

from the advertisement *from people or companies who might actually have a need to do business with you?*

Along these lines, can you imagine the number of unqualified calls that Guardian Security does *not* get because who they are and what their company does is *spelled out* in their name and subtitle? Can you imagine the number of time-wasting phone calls that Dolphin Technology receives from people who think that the company specializes in marine biology? Remember that time is your most precious resource as a business owner. You must preserve it any way you can, and one of the easiest ways is to avoid unwanted

TARGET

Finding your target audience is a critical component of any marketing plan. Again, this may sound obvious, but I have known too many businesses that did not understand their target market.

EXECUTION

You can be the smartest individual on the planet, but unless you effectively execute your brainstorm or concept, you have absolutely nothing. I can create the best radio spot ever recorded, but unless it gets to the radio station on time and with the right phone numbers for the customer to call, the spot itself is worth zero to the client. The most effective marketing plan is the one that gets implemented correctly and on time.

More people fail than succeed in the execution of their marketing plans. I can't tell you the number of times that I have seen great pamphlets, brochures, and publications sent out to thousands of people *with the wrong contact address or phone number!* It does not do your business any good if your potential clients or customers can't call you or find your business. A mistake like this can even make your potential clients reluctant to work

with you. After all, if you can't even get the right address or phone number on your brochure or flyer, how can they trust you to provide *them* with a good product or service? You can put a great deal of work into a marketing project but unless it is properly executed, your efforts will be wasted. *Execution is not only important in marketing, it is also an extremely critical element to the long-term survival of your business.*

A WORD ABOUT CREATIVITY

We have all observed incredibly creative advertising campaigns on television, or on the radio, in print, and in numerous other communications outlets. If you can be both creative and effective in marketing your products or services, more power to you. But there is such a thing as being *too* creative.

After I have watched a humorous or “edgy” television commercial or listened to a radio spot with someone else, I make a point of asking that person at the end of the commercial, "Who was the advertiser?" The commercial may have been a creative masterpiece, but many times when I ask that question, the person doesn't have a clue as to what company was being promoted. This means the commercial has failed. I have seen too many advertising agencies that are more concerned about winning a creative trophy at an end-of-the-year awards banquet than they are about getting results for the client.

AFLAC Insurance is an example of a company that has the right mix of a creative theme and the frequency to make it work. Who hasn't seen the series of commercials with the duck continuing to brand the name "AFLAC" around clueless human beings? What makes the AFLAC commercial series so effective is that the duck keeps *repeating* the company name, in all the commercials. The company has remained consistent with this series of commercials, and has invested millions of dollars over several plus years in

making sure that the message sinks in. When the series first started, I saw the first "AFLAC" duck commercial at least ten times before it really started to take hold.

Now compare the AFLAC ads with another commercial series. This series features a sleek silver sports car or SUV, speeding down the interstate and through city streets, while a background chorus chants, "Zoom zoom zoom!" Eventually, the car passes a little boy in a black suit who is standing by the side of the road. The boy looks at the camera and whispers cryptically, "Zoom zoom!"

All very creative and eye-catching. But think about this: *Can you remember the name of the car brand that is being advertised with this series of commercials?*

Most people can't. All they remember is the "Zoom zoom zoom" chant and the weird little boy at the end of the commercial. (The car brand, by the way, is Mazda.)

And therein lies the problem with most super-humorous creative ads. They don't follow the four basic principles of marketing, which must work together *as a whole* for an ad campaign to be successful. There may be a flaw in the execution of the ad campaign (as when Mazda fails to put their brand name in the "Zoom zoom" chant). Or perhaps the advertiser doesn't back up the creative ads with the frequency and longevity needed to make the campaign work. As soon as the audience is beginning to "get it," the advertising budget for the campaign has already been exhausted.

The point is, you should never assume that being creative or funny will give you an advantage in advertising your business. Unless you have a huge advertising budget, I strongly recommend that you stick with the basics in advertising your product or services. Resist the temptation to be too funny or indirect with your promotional efforts, no matter what medium you choose to advertise in. *Super-creative advertising means nothing if*

your potential clients or customers only remember the advertisement, but can't remember the name of your business or what you offer.