



Top 10 Start Up Marketing Mistakes

- 1) **Trying to make marketing a science:** Most startups begin with technology innovation and the people who develop that innovation are usually, well, technologists. They are visionaries, left-brain thinkers, scientists. The problem is that marketing is often very much outside their wheelhouse because it is part art, part instinct and just a small part science. That marketing is now largely data-driven means that we want to put it in a box and create a proven, repeatable methodology, which may eventually be possible (especially with large data sets), but, alas, large reliable data sets are not normally in the grasp of a small startup.
- 2) **Mistaking technology for execution:** Marketing automation engines (like Pardot and Hubspot) are changing the way we do business, but the purchase of one should not be mistaken for actual marketing. Someone with experience and subject matter expertise needs to drive that engine.
- 3) **Making marketing subjective:** Everyone is a marketer. Truly. We have all spent most of our lives on the receiving end of marketing, so we feel somehow qualified to render subjective judgment on everything from Super Bowl commercials to logo colors. But guess what? We, as consumers, have no idea of the effectiveness of one commercial over another, or the role colors play in brand perceptions. Just because we don't like it doesn't mean it wasn't effective.
- 4) **Mismanaging your board:** Your board is likely made up of great businesspeople with various skillsets. They will all have ideas on how you should market your company, and many of them will be good, but some just won't. It is a mistake to waste time and resources pursuing marketing tactics that won't get you a reliable and repeatable process. Much of marketing is figuring out what NOT to do and saying no with confidence. Likewise, a good dashboard of data-driven marketing metrics should be an essential part of every board meeting.

- 5) **Going to too many industry conferences and tradeshows:** Many a marketer will take the low ground and fill a plan with industry insider events that will have no impact on the bottom line. Events are time and resource intensive so your marketing person may look and be really, really busy, but the results can be disappointing. If you hear “We need to be there because Competitor X is going to be there”, you need a new marketer. If there are more than 6 events on any startup’s marketing calendar, you need to rethink your strategy.
- 6) **Trying to build a 12 or 18 month marketing plan:** Not a good idea. Your marketing team needs the time to figure out what works, the flexibility to double down on what does and the confidence to identify what doesn’t. A 6-month marketing plan is the outside limit.
- 7) **Acquisition distraction:** It’s all too exciting when a potential acquirer comes your way. Trying to demonstrate your value can take up a lot of resources. In many cases, all other progress will be put aside in the pursuit of what might seem like a great exit. Resist the temptation. Don’t let anyone take you off your game plan, even for a minute because an acquisition opportunity is not even a 50-50 bet. Most go by the wayside and many a company will find they have lost valuable ground in the pursuit.
- 8) **Naming/Branding:** You may think your name and your visual brand are hugely important, but they aren’t. Way too many companies spend hours and hours of unnecessary time making subjective choices about a name or a logo. It’s not so important. Make sure the positioning and messaging are crisp and clear. Make sure your name and logo are differentiated and memorable. Don’t let good be the enemy of great.
- 9) **Seeking popular opinion:** See #3. What people like isn’t an indicator of what will work. Find a trustworthy marketing resource and go with their professional opinion.
- 10) **Avoiding controversy:** A meaningful B2B marketing plan will include press releases and other content that is controversial. Take the plunge. You need to be controversial to get attention. Do it with dignity and integrity. As long as you have the courage, convictions and the data to back up your claims, you will get that attention from the media and outpace your more staid competitors. If they have more money and a more established reputation, your only option is to disrupt in the most aggressive way possible.