

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Because we're smack dab in the middle of The Information Age and because time is so darned important, guerrillas do not waste the time of the prospects and customers with gimmicks and pizzazz. Instead, they reward that time with beneficial information and solid content. The substance of their marketing is so lush, yet concise, that substance is their style.

Is your current marketing distinctive because of its style or substance? The ideal answer is both. With its style, it conveys your identity and captures the attention of your targeted audience. With its substance, it makes essential points and motivates that audience.

Well-informed marketers see to it that both their style and substance are obvious but that their product or service always has the starring role in their marketing.

We've all had the experience of viewing a TV spot or reading an ad and wondering what the heck they were talking about, so you know what I'm getting at. Many websites are more confusing than they are enlightening.

In the early days of marketing, nobody needed special effects. When Harley Procter and his cousin, James Gamble, churned their soap too long and it floated, they came out and said Ivory is the soap that floats. Later, stressing its purity, they said it was 99 and 44/100ths percent pure. People knew exactly what they meant.

But now the creative revolution is upon us. In the name of creativity rather than the less glamorous but more accurate name of selling, billions of dollars are being wasted each year. That's a conservative estimate.

The creative rebels, award winners almost every one of them, are carried away by style, and in the melee, substance gets lost. Marketing is definitely not a shuck and jive show or an entertainment medium. Its purpose is selling and it should therefore be loaded with substance.

You can be sure that the top salespeople in the world don't begin their presentations with a tap dance or a cartwheel. They succeed because of the style they use to provide substance, not because of the style itself.

The overriding concept in your marketing should be to present substance and do it with style. That means the emphasis is on the substance. The readers, viewers and website visitors remember the substance. Checks get written, credit cards used, and orders placed because of the substance.

Be on guard against the multitude of "creative" people that populate the marketing profession. Too many of them have been trained to create a gorgeous picture, a rhyming headline, or a flashing website when they should be trying to create an eye-popping upswing in your sales curve.

That sales curve is your responsibility. Remember, if "creative" ideas cost you more than they earn for you, something is wrong with the equation. The equation should read, "creativity equals profits."

Substance consists of both facts and opinions. It communicates both features and benefits. It is as specific as it can possibly be, as specific as 99 and 44/100th percent pure. And it effectively utilizes both words and pictures. What substance isn't is fun -- and you shouldn't try to make people think that it is unless you sell video games or bicycles.

It's style that's fun. Style makes marketing enjoyable to read and hear. Or at least it makes marketing digestible. Remember is that your competition isn't Hollywood. It's that company that's been selling to your customers and attracting your prospects. Your competitors are people who don't have stars in their eyes, simply profits on their mind.

Given the relationship of substance to style, put your money on substance every time. But be aware that there are exceptions to this rule. If, for example, the very essence of your product or service is its style, you may want to convey that style as its primary benefit. The style is its substance.

But most businesses should not even think of selling with style at the expense of substance. Many have tried. Most have failed. Your task: stress your substance but do it with style.