



Finding marketing ideas in odd places

Have you ever been lost in thought while walking down the street and, BAM!, you're hit with a great idea? Was it a product to sell? A solution to one of the world's problems? A cool sentence? Well, this ebook is about those situations.

We've been finding marketing lessons in the weirdest places, from traffic jams to plates of salad. We want to share some of these stories and show that it's a good idea to look beyond our industry to find inspiration.

Who are we? Ext. Marketing Inc. is Canada's leading financial services marketing firm. We help banks, insurance companies and investment management firms achieve their goals, from marketing strategy and execution to meeting their regulatory requirements.

Odd places for you to visit:

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The bright side of being stuck in traffic

You've been there before – you're late, it's boiling, sticky hot and you might as well turn the engine off. But even a traffic jam can yield some positive results! Here are three marketing lessons we learned while stuck on Highway 400.

If you interrupt someone, be nice

We were cut off almost immediately after merging onto the highway. While many drivers' knee-jerk reaction would be somewhere between exasperation and rage, we smiled. Why? Because we got the wave – a simple gesture to let us know that it was unintentional.

Likewise, if you're going to interrupt someone's day with a marketing message, be nice about it and say thank you. You don't want to receive the marketing equivalent of being flipped the bird.

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The herd mentality is alive and well

We saw it over and over again during this traffic nightmare: drivers changing lanes when things slowed down.

We noticed that when traffic came back to the inevitable halt, drivers headed for either the left-hand or right-hand lanes. This happens every time, despite the fact that you can't beat congestion. Half an hour later, we ended up beside the same SUV that had been weaving from lane to lane.

Social evidence as an influencing strategy in marketing is here to stay. Read Robert Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* for more on the subject.

Stay nimble

There aren't many old cars on the road these days. When we were younger, the highways were filled with beaters. Boy, how the times have changed: emissions testing and super-low interest rates are responsible for condemning those old cars to the wrecking yard.

This got us thinking about marketing plans. The lesson learned? Your [marketing plan](#) needs to be nimble. Not only because your business may evolve but also because the environment you're working in may change dramatically ... and quickly.

We honestly hope we never get caught in a traffic jam like that ever again, but we are glad that we were able to turn it into an educational experience. Maybe there's another lesson here – something about always finding the silver lining.

What a weak summer box office can teach us

Even with plenty of monsters, angry apes, super heroes and ninja turtles, box office returns for the summer of 2014 were down approximately 15% from the previous year. Can this relatively weak summer return (movies still made over \$4 billion, after all) tell us anything about marketing? We think there are actually three important points marketers can take away from last summer's blockbuster bust.

What's often missed is the value of considering a new approach in your marketing efforts.

There is a saturation point

No one loves sitting down with a big bag of popcorn to watch plenty of action and special effects as much as the folks at Ext. Marketing Inc. That said, no one has time to see a different blockbuster each week. By spacing out your marketing efforts, you can have a greater impact than if you make a grand announcement or launch a new product every week.

Originality still matters

The biggest film of 2014 was *Guardians of the Galaxy*, which wasn't a sequel and was packed with previously unknown characters (for most movie-goers, at least). This was the first time a film with all new characters had "won the box office" since 2003's *Finding Nemo*.*

Although established marketing practices are always a great starting point, what's often missed is the value of considering a new approach in your marketing efforts. And with the increased use of social media, there are plenty of new areas for the more traditionally minded marketer to consider.

Managing the message is important

Just like how a bad review on Rotten Tomatoes can kill an opening weekend and the long-term return of any movie, bad early reviews can damage the success of a marketing initiative.

Test run any support materials you produce on as many people as possible. Get all your family and friends to take a look at your new website, [blog article](#) or brochure. Send your next [email](#) to a co-worker to ensure your point is getting across.

As many of the world's best directors will tell you, quality is definitely more important than expediency, so make sure your efforts are hitting the mark!

*Summer Review: Why August's Record \$1 Billion Haul Couldn't Save The Summer, Shawn Robbins, September 02, 2014, <http://www.boxoffice.com/latest-news/2014-08-28-summer-2014-review>

Would you like a salad with that?

Several very pioneering – and possibly hungry – researchers tested the idea that an aesthetically pleasing salad would influence a diner’s expectation of the quality of the salad, the eventual enjoyment of the salad and, ultimately, the price someone would pay for that salad.

Imagine three salads: a simple tossed salad, a second arranged to look like a Kandinsky painting and a third arranged in an extremely neat manner, as if built by an obsessed chef.

As the researchers confirmed for us, we do in fact eat with our eyes first. The Kandinsky-esque salad apparently tasted better, was thought to be more complex and more liked, and would command a higher price.

What does your marketing salad look like?

Gone are the days of wordy brochures filled with product jargon.

The rise of infographics, digital and social marketing, and integrated microsites has helped show a customer your company’s value proposition or product details in a more thoughtful way.

Last year we stressed the importance of having your summer interns **conduct an audit** of your marketing materials – this year we urge you to do the same, but then take those old but impactful materials and give them the “fine art” treatment.

- **Do you have a company factsheet that touts sales or investment growth over time?**

Throw in the latest numbers and make it an infographic!

- **Is an old product gaining new traction in the market?**

It might be time to build a microsite so your wholesalers can spread the message easily – and follow up immediately.

And remember, if Kandinsky is too weird, then a Warhol is cool, too!

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Thoughts from a trip to the art gallery

We went to the art gallery to brighten up our day – because there's nothing quite like staring up at a wall full of oil and canvas to get those creative juices flowing. On that day, some thoughts about successful marketing also came to mind.

Treat your best customers very well

The art gallery's family membership comes with great benefits: free visits all year, extra guest passes and complimentary access to special exhibits. Sure, these benefits come at a cost, but members can make that back with just one visit.

Similarly, if your clients like your services and solutions, and they are putting an above-average amount of money with you, you should reward them anyway you can.

People want a great experience

This builds off #1. More than ever before, people want to experience something worth talking about. An art gallery experience starts out on the street when you see the building's stunning architecture and things only get better from there.

Likewise, you've got to offer your clients and prospects a share-worthy experience. An engaging, well-designed website is a good place to start because you can get a lot of mileage out of it. Your goal should be a website that is highly functional and great to look at.

Good design is timeless

Great art stands the test of time. Everyone knows Picasso and Monet, and everyone always will as long as art galleries exist.

Great design stands the test of time too. Now, it's true that mutual fund **brochures** may not be on par with the world's great masterpieces, but financial services marketers should all aspire to create materials that are engaging and can lead to conversations.

Also, brochures are getting shorter and social media is ascending to the throne of marketing royalty. As a result, the amount of copy we use is generally decreasing and design is gaining ever-more importance.

Mutual fund brochures may not be on par with the world's great masterpieces, but financial services marketers should all aspire to create materials that are engaging and can lead to conversations.

CIA style guide secrets revealed!

In case you missed it, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) released their style guide to the public a while back and it is filled with goodies – especially for the financial services industry.

Why is a style guide important?

Let's start with a quote. The CIA puts an emphasis on being direct, and the following paragraph is the foreword:

“Good intelligence depends in large measure on clear, concise writing. The information CIA gathers and the analysis it produces mean little if we cannot convey them effectively. The Directorate of Intelligence and the Agency as a whole have always understood that. Both have been home, from their earliest days, to people who enjoy writing and excel at it.”

– The CIA Style Manual and Writers Guide for Intelligence Publications

The financial services industry isn't much different. Our content, from what we share on Twitter to the brochures and whitepapers we produce, is founded on research. And that research is highly technical.

As financial services marketers, it is our duty to guarantee that readers understand the data because we're talking about their financial future. As a result, style guides are essential to our communications with clients and stakeholders.

What about you?

Does your firm have a style guide? If so, many new terms have popped up in recent years so maybe it's time to revisit it. For example, is it CRM2, CRM-2, CRMII or CRM II? Have you [socialized](#) it recently?

If your firm doesn't yet have a style guide, we think it's time you make it a priority.

“This guide is designed to be helpful and convenient, sensible in organization, and logical in content. It contains, among other changes, a revised list of accepted acronyms and new tips on word usage. The world is not static. Nor is the language we employ to assess it.”

– The CIA Style Manual and Writers Guide for Intelligence Publications

If CIA writers – whose work is likely read by relatively few people – follow a style guide, so should you. As a financial services marketer, you owe it to your readers (investors in one way or another) to deliver sharp copy that's consistent and engaging.

“The world is not static. Nor is the language we employ to assess it.”

The CIA Style Manual and Writers Guide for Intelligence Publications

Walking backwards has its rewards

What can walking backwards for 25 years teach us about marketing?
Apparently, quite a lot.

Mani Manithan has spent the past 25 years walking backwards. It began as a form of protest. But as the years have passed, he now finds walking normally to be a challenge and uncomfortable.

Face forward

Does Mani's problem sound familiar? Trying something new – or something long-forgotten – isn't always that easy for people in the financial services industry. As a result, it's possible for sales and marketing groups to avoid the new and become set in their ways.

Maybe that comfort in the status quo is where the old adage *if it ain't broke, don't fix it* came from?

However, we financial services marketers operate in a rapidly changing business environment where it can become absolutely necessary to relearn how to “walk normally” just like Mani needs to. Don't take a backwards approach – keep pushing ahead!

Stop before you walk

So you've turned around to the possibility of change. But it's important to avoid changing just for the sake of change. Ask *why are we going to walk down this path of change?*

Think about the current focus on the customer-centric, advice-based marketing model for instance. It was born out of the proliferation of investment products. Those companies that weren't prepared to change course – away from a pure product push toward clients – may have found their messages falling flat.

Today, we face other great challenges and are presented with tremendous opportunities in turn. One example is the great shift in communications and how people receive messages from companies. Social media, mobile and more engaging digital options should be on every financial services marketer's mind ... and their to-do list.

Find a strong footing

There are a number of new ways to get your message out – **microsites**, **infographics**, digital flipbooks, **videos**/animated vignettes and all of the possible tie-ins with social media. Each offers a unique way to convey a message and value proposition – to tell your story – to new and existing clients.

If your clients and prospects want this type of communication, give it to them.

We financial services marketers operate in a rapidly changing business environment where it can become absolutely necessary to relearn how to “walk normally.”

From the local market, with love

We're big supporters of local farmers and that's why we're always returning to the market to buy fresh fruits, vegetables and meats. While walking among the stalls, we got to thinking about what we could learn from these businesses in the market.

The customer is in control

At the local market, you can choose what steak, fish fillet or apples you want. If you have a custom request, all you need to do is ask. There's a great sense of satisfaction knowing that you're choosing what's right for you.

There's a lesson there for financial services firms – keep listening to your clients because they want to be heard, and they can teach you a few things about what you're doing right and wrong.

People want to know the owners

That big guy behind the counter – you know, that guy tending to the pig – he owns the place and he is passionate about his work. He can tell you everything about what you want to buy. And it feels good buying from him because you know who you are supporting.

We don't think financial services firms should shy away from featuring the people who run their companies. They have stories to tell and people want to hear them. **Blogs** and videos are a great start. So is putting a favourite executive into the Twitterverse.

There will always be a place for “local”

We think the local food movement will eventually take over the entire food industry. The more people learn about the farming process, the more they want their food to come from somewhere nearby. (A February raspberry craving may be another story.)

We believe that it is important for financial services firms – especially those engaged in investment management – to highlight their global resources and global reach. Nevertheless, we think it's a good idea to keep your local people such as sales reps, client services staff and portfolio managers – the individuals who interact with your clients – in the spotlight as well.

Keep listening to your clients because they want to be heard, and they can teach you a few things about what you're doing right and wrong.

What we learned from a kid's playlist

Have you heard of the band OK Go? We hadn't until a few years ago when one of our kids showed us the now famous Rube Goldberg Machine video. We were hooked.

OK Go may be the only band around that's better known for their viral music videos than their actual music. The band's creative videos have been viewed more than a hundred million times, because they know how to entertain, engage and inspire. Here's what we've learned from OK Go's viral marketing success.

Do something nobody else is doing

OK Go's videos are like nothing we've seen before, because they're like nothing that's been done before. They don't meet anyone's expectations of what a typical music video should look like ... but in a good way.

Almost every video OK Go has made has gone viral. And millions of people eagerly anticipate each new release. Our takeaway from this: OK Go has found their "thing."

What's your "thing?" What are you doing that nobody else in your industry is doing? Maybe you give the most entertaining speeches or are a thought leader who is always sought after for commentary on a particular topic. Find your "thing," perfect it and own it.

Put in real effort

We're all pressed for time. The business world doesn't stop so we can focus on blog posts, social media or video marketing. That's why it's so tempting to skip the original content and share content from other sources with retweets or links to other companies' blog posts.

Here's the thing: truly memorable, sharable content is original. It takes real time and effort ... and sometimes money. Keep sharing content from others, and hang on to your lower-effort marketing initiatives. But try to balance these things with a couple of bigger, more creative projects each year that will get you noticed.

Find a creative partner

This isn't really about OK Go. It's about the car company that was smart enough to [partner](#) with them.

In their video for Needing/Getting, OK Go gets a moving Chevy Sonic to play their song for them. The car is transformed into a giant instrument and plays more instruments while the band drives. As a lower-budget band, OK Go couldn't have afforded to make this video on their own. Likewise, Chevy wouldn't have come up with this concept without OK Go's creative vision and talent.

Both the band and the brand got great exposure from their partnership (almost 32 million views as of writing and a prominent Super Bowl spot). The lesson here is that if you can't identify your "thing" or put together a big-push campaign on your own, find a creative partner who can help.

Find your "thing," perfect it and own it.

Insights from courtside

At a recent Raptors game, we were struck by the energy of the crowd. It was very different than what we'd experienced at hockey and baseball games. Basketball just has a different "feel" than other sports. It seems younger, hipper and hotter. The National Basketball Association (NBA) is doing something right.

Hang out with your core market

The first rule of marketing is to know your audience. But the NBA also knows where to find that audience and how to engage them. The league says its core market is 18 to 34 year olds.

Where would you find this particular group? On social media, which is also where you'll find the NBA. Various teams' Twitter feeds are full of pop culture references to hot hip hop artists and TV shows. You'll find plenty of Vines of dunks, drives and behind-the-scenes silliness.

The end result is a league – and star players – that fans can relate to.

Your core market may be very different, but you can still find out where they're hanging out and meet them there.

Let your fans (i.e., clients) sell your brand

Most professional sports leagues are proprietary when it comes to live footage. Not the NBA. They let their fans share game pictures and video over social media without jumping through any hoops (pun intended). This is a subtle yet effective way to sell a brand.

Another winning idea: celebrity team **ambassadors**. The Raptors have Drake, the Nets have Jay Z and the Lakers have Jack Nicholson. These aren't celebrities paid to endorse a team. They're genuine fans ... who happen to have huge followings of their own.

You might not think your brand has fans, but it has loyal clients who are happy to spread the word about what you do and why they love working with you. Let them.

There is no off-season

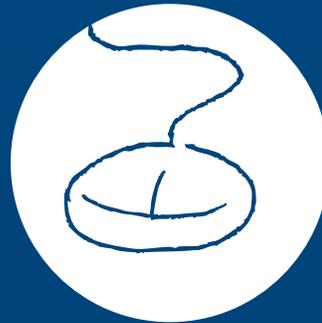
Letting your clients sell your brand doesn't mean you don't have to do any work. The NBA's marketing people don't get an off-season, because they can't let fans forget about the game for four or five months.

While your clients are promoting your brand, you will be, too. Use a consistent voice, keep your message short and simple, and have a sense of humour. Above all, don't be afraid to take a few risks! Sometimes the outcome won't be what you want. But quite often, the payoff for taking smaller, more calculated risks can be big.

What the NBA knows about marketing: hang out with your clients, let your fans sell your brand and take risks.

We hope you found some inspiration from these stories.
We sure did. If you need help with your marketing deliverables,
from writing and editing to design, project management and
beyond – please contact us today at:

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