



MARKETING STAR



## Shel Horowitz: Author, Consultant, and Founder of FrugalMarketing.com

[By Anique Gonzalez]

“Marketing kind of found me. I came out of college with a very untraditional resume having had numerous career paths and little short bursts with each one. I had very much enjoyed all things related to writing, so I started with the idea that I would start a little side business that would tide me over until my freelance magazine-writing career took off. Well, that was 1981,” Shel Horowitz joked.

Although Horowitz never took a marketing course while in school, he has made a successful career for himself by recognizing how to reach consumers and being mindful of creating a message that will ensure action. These innate abilities were initially honed when he graduated from college and created a small typing business, which required him to discover innovative and inexpensive ways to market.

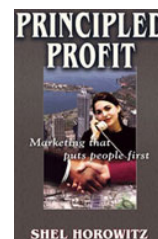
As he explained, “I got into marketing by marketing my own small business.” He added, “It really plays to my strengths because I’ve always been good with words,

and I think being able to present a concept that’s either technical or abstract, or simply presenting the real message, is something that I’m good at in terms of creating something that ordinary people can understand, appreciate, relate to, and be moved to action from.”

The fact that marketing allows Horowitz to draw upon his strengths not only enables him to create effective marketing but also allows him to recognize marketing that is ineffective. For example, oftentimes Horowitz finds that marketers do not appropriately target consumers, or worse, target the right consumers with the wrong message.

Mostly, though, “bad marketing” involves creating marketing communications that are, for the high-tech sector in particular, “focused on the people who are writing the manuals as opposed to the people who are using them.” In fact, Horowitz later joked that his role is to “save the world from really bad marketing.”

Throughout his career, Horowitz has served as a marketing consultant, founded his own Internet company ([FrugalMarketing.com](http://FrugalMarketing.com)), and authored seven books about marketing. His last three books, *Grassroots Marketing for Authors and Publishers*, *Principled Profit: Marketing That Puts People First*, and *Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World*, have all received various honors, including an Apex Award, an Indie Excellence Award Honorable Mention, and a mention as a *Forbes* Book of the Year finalist.



The main concept behind these books, and Horowitz’s marketing beliefs in general, is twofold and incorporates both frugal and ethical constructs. Both facets are rather straightforward. As Horowitz simply stated, “Ethical marketing is doing things that allow you to sleep comfortably at night and look in the mirror and not see somebody evil.”

And Horowitz is a firm believer that marketing ethically will enable businesses

**Q. What do you like to do in your free time?**

**A.** Well, I live on a mountain on a farm in Massachusetts, and I hike that mountain almost every day. I do a lot of bike riding, which is a challenge in this mountainous neighborhood that I live in. I read enormous amounts. I usually have somewhere between five and 10 books going at once. I’m always reading. My son and I will often play a game or two of chess in the course of a day, and my mom and I will play Scrabble. I enjoy music a lot. Oh, and I like gourmet vegetarian cooking and fine dark fair-trade chocolate. To me, paradise is in the 90% to 100% cocoa range.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** Beethoven’s Triple Concerto, The Who’s *Who’s Next*, Pete Seeger’s Carnegie Hall concert. It’s a five-CD changer. I have pretty eclectic musical taste.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** You know, I really don’t watch TV. I spend so much time looking at computer monitors I don’t want to look at any monitor. I will go to a movie once in a while or bring one home, but I basically don’t watch TV.

**Q. What was the last magazine you read?**

**A.** *The Utne Reader*.

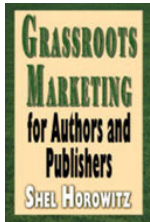
**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** Well, there are a lot of people who show that ordinary people can make a difference in the world. And all the work I do is to make a difference in the world. So I’m going to say Lech Walesa, the solidarity labor-union leader who became the prime minister of Poland—as somebody who is just an ordinary person and refused to tolerate injustice and ended up riding the horse to places he never could have imagined.



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to become more successful. Essentially, it allows companies to develop and maintain a level of trust with the consumer. A vocal proponent of ethical marketing, Horowitz is a big backer of the Business Ethics Pledge, a campaign that is “try[ing] to create a tipping point toward ethical business.”

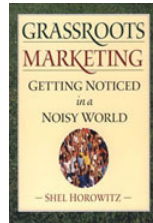


Frugal marketing “is just doing it most cost-effectively as possible—getting good value for what you put in. Let’s say you’re purchasing advertising. It makes much more sense to purchase advertising that is targeted directly to the people who are going to be your customers with a message they want and need to hear at a time when they want and need to hear it. [Targeted marketing is] far more effective and cheaper than saturation marketing.”

During the time that he has been in the field, Horowitz has seen the marketing industry evolve tremendously. The consumers to whom companies are marketing their products are more informed and connected than ever before.

“Metaphorically speaking, it’s no longer enough to dangle a carrot in front of somebody and say, ‘Here, bite me and see what you think.’ Now you have to compare 10 different breeds of carrots, different soil conditions, and now anybody can jump on the Internet and look for carrots in

Hadley, MA, and find 20 providers and find the differences between them. Also, if the consumer goes away unhappy, the consumer doesn’t just tell 10 friends anymore; now they tell 10,000 people on yourcarrotsucks.com or on a blog.”



Even though technology has resulted in a more skeptical customer base, Horowitz acknowledged that building relationships with consumers is easier. Why? While there are many more channels within each individual market, information about the consumer is easily and readily accessible—especially with the advent of the Internet. So companies know exactly what consumers need and want. Moreover, Horowitz said, companies that build successful relationships with their bases “understand that it’s not enough to just push product but push the lifestyle that’s involved in the product.”

And marketers, take heed; the field will continue to substantially evolve in the coming years...especially in terms of mass-marketing communications, which over the years have become less and less effective.

“People are so immunized to commercials right now. They can avoid many commercials with devices like TiVo, but even if they see the commercials, it doesn’t register in their brain because it’s marketing to the masses,

and the masses don’t really exist,” Horowitz said. “The masses are composed of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands or millions of individuals with individual interests and individual passions and individual dislikes and individual disabilities, and all have to be approached differently.”

So how should marketers approach this ever-changing field? Horowitz had this to say: “I’m very much a believer in human-centered marketing. You’re marketing to people; you’re not marketing to computer chips, [and] you’re not marketing to telephones, [and] you’re not even marketing to job titles.”

Yet some of his greatest influences—Claude Hopkins, David Ogilvy, and Joan Stewart—support one general message that provides the best advice in terms of how to approach marketing now and in the future. The idea, Horowitz explained, is “to write copy that is honest and compelling and tells a story and shows the prospect how he or she will benefit.”

### ON THE NET

FrugalMarketing.com  
[www.frugalmarketing.com](http://www.frugalmarketing.com)

Business Ethics Pledge  
[www.business-ethics-pledge.org](http://www.business-ethics-pledge.org)

*Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World*  
[www.amazon.com/Grassroots-Marketing-Getting-Noticed-Noisy/dp/1890132683](http://www.amazon.com/Grassroots-Marketing-Getting-Noticed-Noisy/dp/1890132683)

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