



MARKETING STAR



Richard Laermer: Founder and CEO of RLM Public Relations, Author, and Revolutionary—Part Two

[By Anique Gonzalez]

Being punk, and thereby participating in the revolution, is definitely not being just another face among the masses. How is a company supposed to be successful and ensure it sells its product if it does not stand out—if it does not employ innovative ways to promote its brand and engage consumers?

“Think about this for a minute. There are four products right now with the same slogan. The products are Boniva, Sony, Hummer, and Newcastle beer. They all have the same slogan, and the slogan is ‘Like no other.’ Wouldn’t you think that somebody would be, like, watching TV?” Laermer said teasingly. “It’s like, ‘Give me a break. That has to stop.’”

Like no other? How can consumers seriously believe that statement when there are four products that are ‘like no other’?

So, now that you know what kind of marketing doesn’t work, what are some examples of punk marketing that have been put into action and actually do work?

Remember the Turner Broadcasting cartoon bomb scare, when Boston police mistakenly thought LED ads featuring a cartoon character were explosives? In reality, the ads were simply promoting an upcoming movie. Mini Coopers were written into *The Italian Job*, and by not-so coincidental accident, the cars were re-released at the same time the movie came out. And then there was Audi’s three-month-long stolen-car TV drama “The Art of the Heist,” a marketing campaign wherein Audi’s new A3 played a pivotal role in an alternate-reality game in which a group of characters struggled to stop an art heist.

What these three campaigns had in common was that they all not only got the attention of

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

A. I take airplanes to the west coast. I have a house outside of Palm Springs. We lived in L.A. for a couple of years when we had our office out there. So the remnants of that is this beautiful house that we bought in La Quinta. Whenever I have a free minute, I get on an airplane and go there. I also *love* old movies; they’re the only reason I’m still sane. I have thousands of them.

Q. What DVD is in your DVD player right now?

A. The first season of *Emergency*, the TV series. And the movie *Little Children*, which I got bootleg from Hong Kong. It’s a legal bootleg, though.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. Without a doubt, *The Simpsons*. I’m obsessed with *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* have never really waned for me in 19 years. June 26 or July 26, when the movie comes out, I’m going to be the first person in line. You know, as far as I’m concerned, that’s a story that’s supposed to be so controversial and a family of fights, but there’s more heart in that show than any show I’ve ever seen on TV. Consistently, it’s always been about heart, it’s always been about love and about family, and I think that’s pretty cool for a show that basically makes fun of everything in America.

the press but also the attention of consumers. And that was the ultimate objective.

The crux of punk marketing isn’t the belief that consumers don’t want to be approached; it’s figuring out *how* to approach them.

“Consumers are looking to marketers for really cool ideas and promotions and ways to be a part of the brand, and they want a little less of people just talking to them all of the time,” Laermer explained.



Because the field of marketing has changed so drastically, so too must marketers. And what is Laermer’s advice for those individuals climbing up the ranks? Specifically, how can they prepare to take part in the revolution? By being gumble.

“Gumble” simply means being “constantly flexible and never rolling your eyes at things that come your way. If you do an internship and people ask you to do things that you think are ‘beneath you,’ it’s not true. We’ve seen a lot of people come out of school and come into our company who really feel like they know everything and they deserve every opportunity. The word ‘deserve’ needs to be stricken from everybody’s vocabulary. Nobody deserves



MARKETING STAR

anything; you have to work for it. And that's where gumbe comes in," Laermer said.

However, simply being flexible doesn't ensure success; mentorship also plays a critical role. Laermer is a huge proponent of mentorship, as he himself was mentored and believes it helps to shape one's perspective on the field.

"I think it is one of the most important things in anybody's career. I know this sounds like I'm being a little precocious here, but the truth of the matter is that if people aren't mentored, they don't understand the bigger picture; they just understand the day-to-day. And that's not good. How can you become a leader if you don't understand the big picture?" Laermer added.

While going to school and learning everything you can while there is extremely valuable, ultimately the theoretical knowledge needs to be supported by application. There are certain things you can learn only by doing them first-hand, not by reading about situations in a textbook. This is also why Laermer touts the importance of internships. In the world of marketing, "the skills [necessary to succeed] are creativity and aggressiveness and being true to your mission. These are things you have to learn with experience; schools can't teach you that."

Q. What was the last magazine you read?

A. *GOOD*, *The New Yorker*, and *Time Out New York*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. My dad. He's just a great guy; he's just a terrific guy, and he taught me the one thing that sticks with me every day, which is that time is irretrievable. He also said one other thing that I think about, even though I used to make fun of him every day while I was growing up. He said, "What you put into it is proportionate to what you get out of it." That's damn true. And my father is 78 years old, and he's the most childish person I know, and I think that's pretty cool.

Humility is a major theme in Laermer's beliefs. This is the only way he believes an individual will get the most out of an experience, learn as much as he or she can, and properly prepare for the ongoing battle.

"The next person that tells me, 'I know you want to teach me that, but I already know it,' they'll probably be walked to our elevator and asked not to come back. People need to take a deep breath and park their ego at the door and say, 'What can I learn? What can I actually get from this position and these

people around me who have been doing this for so long? What inside dirt can I learn? What mechanisms can I pick up?'" Laermer said.

Humility goes a long way in marketing, too. Marketers can't continue to ignore the signs of change. They must recognize that while their tactics and strategies brought success in the past, the field and the consumers it is trying to reach are evolving at an increasingly rapid pace, and past techniques no longer work.

So, now that you know about the revolution, what are you going to do about it? What actions will you take? Ultimately, the question is this: Will you become a casualty and be "trampled in the wake of rebels," or will you encourage and partake in the fight toward freedom?

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