

# Resisting change

## Does change frighten you?

If so, you are not alone. Many people are so frightened of change that they cling to outmoded things. For some people, it is that shoulder-padded 1980s look that keeps them grounded. In business, especially the marketing business, resistance to change may not look as jarring as a 1980s ensemble, but it still causes plenty of pain.

## The only constant is change

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your perspective, change is constant. Technology is especially fond of change and this kind of change is not only hard to deal with but expensive. Upgrade to Vista anyone? A few years ago, we would have never dreamed that we would be communicating with each other in warp speed via text messages or Twitter, but yet here we are.

I have noticed that many people in the marketing industry resist change. Some PR practitioners may still insist on sending out press releases via fax or regular mail. Some may keep their website static, never updating. Many scoff at Twitter or blogs or Facebook, thinking that they are flavor of the moment and quickly gone.

Whether Twitter will be here a year from now is debatable, but what is not debatable is that it changes the way people communicate and connect. If anything has derived from the new social media world, is how close connections can be to anyone anywhere. One can be in contact with an Australian designer or a French writer. And the other reality is that there is more information out there than ever before. It IS hard to keep up. But ignoring it because you don't like it will not make it go away. I have heard many people say they "don't have time for blogs or for Twitter." Do you also not have time for the news

and for email? My point is that the way people are communicating and learning is changing, and by resisting that change, especially if you are a marketing person, you are staying behind the times.

This reminds me of a friend who refuses to be on Facebook. She and I were catching up and she relayed information about a mutual friend, whom I haven't spoken to in a while. I told her I already knew. She wondered how I knew. I told her I saw it on Facebook. The point is people communicate with each other via social media, and it is necessary for marketing people to understand where people find out things.

Let me know what things you are resisting, and why. I really want to know!

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## **The question of the day: Is Twitter Worth It?**

It's on the minds of people everywhere: should I Tweet on Twitter? Some people think it is silly. Some people think it is stupid. Some people think it is a waste of time. I even saw a letter to the editor in the Washington Post where some guy was saying that he was above hearing all about how people enjoyed breakfast or whatever (he must be down to brass tacks guys, because God knows, in real life everybody talks about extremely important stuff all the time). Well folks, in order to answer this question, I have decided to let you see what other people out in the blogosphere think about it:

Janet Fouts from Social Media Enabler, says it is worth it. (I found this post through Social Media Today, worth a look through if you are interested in this topic)

Neil Patel from QuickSprout sees pros and cons.

Copyblogger says you can grow your business with Twitter and that you can improve your writing with it.

Work it Mom is in favor of Twitter

And finally, Chris Winfield uses Twitter to find out if it is a time waster or not.

And me? I think you can't beat the ROI. Twitter is free, and if I learn something it is totally worth it, and if I am wasting my time, it is also worth it.

Thoughts from the peanut gallery?



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## Everything can be bought

A few months ago, I wrote about airline advertising. You have probably all seen the ads on traytables and on the backs of tickets. This is fine as long as it keeps the beverages free and keeps the airlines flying. But today I am writing about airport advertising. Airports have always had plenty of places to advertise, from the bag carousels to the luggage carts. But now, I have seen the most unusual type of airport advertising yet: advertising on the outside of the gate connector.

Yesterday I was at Miami International Airport, not my favorite airport but that would be the subject for a whole other blog, and as our airplane pulled up to the gate, I noticed that all the gate connectors were sporting HSBC Bank advertising.

I have never seen this type of advertising before, and I

wonder two things, how much it costs and how much impact it can have. Sure, lots of passengers are potentially trapped audiences for this type of advertising, but why would a bank choose this type of advertising? More sense would be for a fast food restaurant (one with a branch inside the airport) or a soft drink or something that you would buy soon, but a bank? Are you going to go open an account because you see that it is advertised quite literally on the airport structure itself?

In any case, this shows that advertising can be placed almost everywhere. Creativity or business greed?

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## **When the tag line doesn't add up**

There is a commercial that annoys me because its tag line is just plain stupid. OK, there are probably several commercials like that, but I just saw the one for Smucker's this morning. You know Smucker's –it makes jam and jelly. It is widely available. It may even be good (if you happen to like a little High Fructose Corn Syrup in your jam). But Smucker's assumes that you and everyone else on the planet thinks Smucker's is good. They can be forgiven for that, after all, they are in the business of promoting their product. What I can't fathom is why they think their name conveys the goodness of their product. Smucker's? It looks remarkably like a word in Yiddish that is not exactly complimentary. And yet, the company's marketers tell us: With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good. I am left thinking, really? Why? What is it about the NAME Smucker that makes it good? Is Smucker will known for all the good things he did? Am I missing something? If the tag simply said: With Smucker's, it has to be good, then I would

buy it. But the name is meaningless to me and other than we know that Smucker's makes jams, we don't know from the name alone that they are good.

Do you have a tag line that makes you wonder or even cringe? Let me know in the comments!



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## Are we losing radio too?

### Advertising dollars

It doesn't make it into the news too often, but radio is hurting from the same causes as the newspaper industry is: advertising losses. In radio's case, it has a lot do with Ipod and MP3 players. But it has a lot to do with the recession too.

### Format change! That's the solution!

I was just reading this *Washington Post* article about a classic rock station here in Washington that is (AGAIN) changing formats to adult/pop contemporary. The station's owners seem to think this will attract a younger, female audience. It might, if it weren't for the fact that nearly every other radio station in the market plays Pop and AC. It seems inane/insane to switch formats in this economy. The article says that they station had good numbers, yet it was not enough.

### You can't (and shouldn't) please everybody

It seems to me this has something to do with what brought Wall Street down: GREED. The idea that you have to have the most,

and by a large margin, to be the absolute leader. It does not serve the listener, and it certainly will not accomplish it in the end. People become fiercely loyal to a radio station and its DJs. Whenever there is a format change there will be upheaval and resentment. And frankly, in this market, this particular change causes a homogenization that is truly unbearable.

### **What about segmentation and target audiences?**

When all radio stations play the same music, you can assume they all have the same audience, right? So, if you are trying to reach older people, where are you supposed to advertise in Washington? My point is that a variety of formats allows media buyers to reach different target audiences. Not everybody is seeking for women, 18 plus. Some may want adults, 40 plus or another segment. In a sense, format changes affect the entire market.

### **Losing sight of what you are**

It seems to me that when you aim for the mass, you actually end up losing what makes you special. This particular radio station has gone through several format changes and I predict will either change again or go off the air. In the era of the Ipod/MP3 player and declining revenue, the solution is to offer something that can NOT be found elsewhere. That is how you find an audience, and more importantly, how you build a LOYAL following.



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# The opinion ad

## Newspapers are in a downward spiral

Every day there is more bad news for the newspaper industry. The *New York Times* will eliminate its City section, Chicago Sun-Times is filing Chapter 11, *Washington Post* is offering its fourth buyout in 6 years, and on and on. Even CBS Sunday Morning covered the coming “death” of newspapers.

## Paid opinions

One area that is fairly unique to newspapers is the paid opinion ad. Usually a full page, this ad will carry the unadulterated opinion of an organization, group, industry or even individual. The target is public opinion and/or lawmakers. We’ve seen “it’s our fault” ads and “you’re wrong and here’s why” ads. In fact, this is a time honored way of getting opinions across without the filter of an editor or a reporter.

## Where will they go?

Sure there is advertising on the Internet, between pop ups and banners, we’re often inundated with advertising messages. However, we can pretty much ignore these ads. Only if we are in the market for say, acai diet supplement, do we click to find out more. Opinion ads use the full page newspaper format because they need the space to communicate a complicated message. It’s not about a sale or product attributes. I can’t see how these type of ads will subsist in an Internet-only market.



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# Marketing is personal

## How do you respond when someone asks you for a favor?

Ideally, when someone asks you for a favor (some information, a quote, some advice) you respond nicely. Sometimes you may not be able or willing to grant the favor, and in this case, you still should be nice. Why? because people do business with people they like. And being not nice makes people not like you.

## Sample negative conversation

Me: Hi, I am looking for a web designer for my client, and I am wondering if I could get a quote from you.

Graphic designer (sounding grouchy): (Big sigh) well, I don't know. What kind of website?

Me: Mostly static, about 10 pages or so, and with some room to make changes, like on the staffing page.

GD (mumbling and sounding pissed): Hmm, well, we work with CMS, and it's hard to just give you a quote, but you know websites start around \$20,000.

Me: Well, it sounds like we aren't a good fit for each other. Thanks.

GD (sounds relieved to not have to deal with me): OK.

This graphic designer, whom I had found listed through the AIGA (contact me if you want her name), was downright nasty. I have made many of these calls, and for the most part, the designers I have spoken to have been helpful. They ask questions, and they say they will get back to me with an estimate. Even if the estimate is not in my ballpark, I now have a graphic designer contact. You never know what can come up.

## **What would have made this conversation go better.**

If she had said something like: “Thanks for your call. I am happy to do an estimate for you, but you should know our website designs start at \$20,000. Is that within your budget?”

Marketing is personal because it is people who make decisions, and personal biases affect decisions. Like I said before, we’d rather do business with people we like (or at least respect). Sometimes it is not your credentials, or your abilities, or your writing skill or your design skill, it is your likeability. Being polite and being nice can go a long way to getting you business, and conversely, being rude and being nasty can almost assure you of losing business.



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# **On doing things piecemeal**

## **Are you a small business with a tight marketing budget?**

If you are, you probably have fallen prey to the idea that you should do (marketing) things as you can afford them. You know, an ad here, a brochure there. Budget-wise, this may make sense. After all, you can’t afford a large campaign, or an ad agency. Branding-wise, not so much. It’s tough to build up an image on unconnected pieces of the puzzle. The missing link is the connection, or the reason, behind each piece.

## **Think strategically**

In business, there is strategy and there are tactics. Often companies fall into tactics without thinking about the strategy. Many people can’t tell the difference. Here’s a quick example: sending a press release is a tactic, achieving

positive publicity is a strategy. Ideally, tactics should follow your strategy.

**You must know what you want to accomplish so that you can figure the steps to make it happen.**

Often, small business owners are overwhelmed with trying to do everything: managing staff, invoicing, doing the books, buying inventory, negotiating. Marketing may be a distant thought, something to do when there is down time. This is unfortunate because marketing will bring business in. Neglecting your marketing will result in a business downturn, for sure.

### **Develop a basic marketing plan**

The easiest thing to do is to devote some time to thinking about what you want to accomplish. Perhaps you want more female customers, or larger organizations. Write these goals down. Figure out who your current customers are. Figure out how much budget you can afford to devote to marketing. See what you already have and what you need.

Here are some elements of a marketing plan:

- Current situation/Situation analysis
- Goals
- Target audience
- Budget
- Tactics for reaching target audience (and this is where your ads, brochures, press releases fit in)

Remember, doing marketing piecemeal will only result in getting small chunks of your target audience.



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# It's the media

## Is it just me?

Or is it the 24 news cycle, but it seems that more and more the media is reporting on the media. Witness the Jon Stewart-CNBC debacle. It was reported on in every other media outlet. Today, on a *Washington Post* blog, instead of doing any original reporting or commentating, the writer posted video of President Obama's interview with 60 Minutes. As well as there was a large piece in the Style section about Steve Kroft, who conducted the aforementioned interview.

Has the media itself become more newsworthy? Doubtful.

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# What's making you sweet?

## Is it HFCS?

In the past few months, the Corn Refiners Association has been running some ads featuring the much-maligned high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). In case you haven't heard, many doctors and researchers blame HFCS for the obesity epidemic because HFCS is found in millions of food items and seems to be metabolized differently in the body. Recently some research found that the way HFCS is manufactured causes the release of mercury. Bottom line, corn refiners had to act. After all, their product is beginning to be perceived as bad for you.

## The commercial

I am sure you've seen the commercials. A couple is sitting on blanket in a park (oh so idyllic) and she offers him a ice pop made with HFCS. When he recoils, she counters telling him it

is made from corn and it's fine in moderation.

You can see the commercials and read the "facts" about HFCS at the Corn Refiners Association website.

### **The backlash or the return of sugar**

It turns out that sugar is not about to roll over and play dead. It is making a comeback. In fact, many products are using it as a selling point, as pointed out in this New York Times article. Of course, some products are just advertising that they are not made with HFCS (like the Thomas English Muffins' package that blares no high fructose corn syrup).

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