

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 1

*"Mistakes are the portals of discovery."*  
James Joyce (1882-1941)

In marketing, like most things in life, success comes only after making mistakes—lots of them. I've sure made my fair share of mistakes. And I've also learned from others' mistakes in the market. So, pull up a chair and learn from our mistakes—so you don't have to make them.

I caution you though. This isn't an exhaustive list. With marketing so dynamic and fast-paced, new and novel marketing mistakes are made each day. But what I'll cover here are the most common marketing errors that small businesses commit.

If you notice any of these things happening in your marketing, *stop* and take a step back. Each of these seemingly innocuous mistakes can be harmful, maybe even fatal, to your business.

**Mistake #1—Thinking Marketing is Advertising**

"What do you do for a living?" the person standing across from me asks.

"I'm in marketing," I say.

"Oh, so you make commercials," he says.

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 2

“No, but that’ is a part of marketing.” I say

“Do you sell stuff?” he asks.

“No, but that’s a part of marketing too.” I say.

“So what exactly do you do?” he’s a bit frustrated by now!

“As a marketer, I make sure those things are done, PLUS we have the right products, confirm they’re priced correctly, deliver them through the right channels, say the right things about them, get them in front of the right people, give those people a reason to buy, make sure they stay satisfied and then, give them a reason to buy more or get others to buy,” I say.

“Oh...” he says (by now frantically searching the room for his next conversation).

At that point I usually excuse myself and head for another side of the room. Yes marketing is advertising. Yes, marketing is sales. But it’s also a whole lot more.

Strategic marketing covers pricing, product matters, distribution channels, marketing communications, marketing processes and promotion (of which advertising and sales are only a part).

Achieving marketing success requires getting more from your marketing resources—time, talent, and dollars. That requires strategy—thought followed by action. Effective marketing strategies come from

Excepted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"

by Jay B. Lipe

(published in summer '02)

[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make \_\_\_3

informed thinking, market research, and thoughtful discussion. This all supports the fact that marketing is more of a process. The sum total of all these actions will generate marketing success for your business.

**Mistake #2—Lacking Patience**

These days we expect immediate results. Want to know how your stocks are doing? Dial into the Internet for an up-to-the-minute check. Want to see what I'm looking at? I'll fax you a copy. Need to know what Kevin in Kenya, Carla in Canada and Tim in Timbuktu think? I'll set up a conference call while we're on the line.

In a world like this, is it any wonder we have short attention spans? Yet, successful marketing depends on an approach that's 180 degrees the opposite direction. Why? Because marketing is about changing people's behavior. And that simply doesn't happen overnight (Those of you with kids *really* know what I'm talking about!).

A short while ago, I met with a fellow consultant and told him about my marketing work with growing companies. After several meetings, he assured me he'd have some business for me. Months later, after receiving my newsletter, he let me know he still had

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 4

me in mind. A couple months after that, he introduced me to one of his clients—it led nowhere. Several months after that, I met with another client of his—again no deal.

A couple months go by later (we're now 1 ½ years later and counting), he suggested I lunch with yet another client. More meetings, lunches, and then finally, a full 2 years after meeting this gentleman, I began working with one of his clients.

Today, this company is a valued client of mine. But, what's the lesson here? Stick it out. If I'd given up after year one, I'd have missed out on all those revenues...and referrals.

It pays to be patient in marketing. In fact, the first time you do promote something, you're really just creating awareness in your prospect's mind. The second time, you're reinforcing the awareness and beginning to uncover a need. The third time, your prospect will sit up, take notice and maybe even respond.

Excerpted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"

by Jay B. Lipe

(published in summer '02)

[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 5

**Sidebar Box**

How long should you be prepared to wait for a response to one of your ads? Here's one thought on the subject:

<i>The __ time a prospect sees your ad...</i>	<i>They...</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Don't even see it.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Don't even notice it.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Are aware it's there.
4 <sup>th</sup>	Have a fleeting sense they've seen it somewhere before.
5 <sup>th</sup>	Actually read the ad.
6 <sup>th</sup>	Thumb their nose at it.
7 <sup>th</sup>	Get a little irritated with it.
8 <sup>th</sup>	Start to think "Here's that confounded ad again."
9 <sup>th</sup>	Start to wonder if they're missing out on something.
10 <sup>th</sup>	Ask their friends and neighbors if they've tried it.
11 <sup>th</sup>	Wonder how the company pays for all these ads.
12 <sup>th</sup>	Start to think it's a good product.
13 <sup>th</sup>	Start to feel the product has value.
14 <sup>th</sup>	Start to remember wanting a product exactly like this for a long time.
15 <sup>th</sup>	Start to yearn for it because they can't buy it.
16 <sup>th</sup>	Accept the fact that they will buy it sometime in the future.
17 <sup>th</sup>	Make a note to buy the product.
18 <sup>th</sup>	Curse their poverty for not allowing them to buy this terrific product.
19 <sup>th</sup>	Count their money very carefully.
20 <sup>th</sup>	Buy what your ad offers.

Who wrote this?—Thomas Smith, a London businessman in the *nineteenth century*. These words, written in 1885, still seem valid today.

**Mistake #3—Fearing Failure**

If you're in a small or mid-sized business, you have a key advantage over others. How? With your ability to take risks, you're fast and nimble and can get more marketing efforts (programs, products, etc.) to market.

Excepted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"  
by Jay B. Lipe  
(published in summer '02)  
[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 6

faster than others. In larger companies, they spend countless hours just selling their ideas to management (I speak from personal experience here). Not so with a small business. In a small business, you can use this time to refine and execute your ideas. You'll be in the market, while the corporate folks are still deciding if this is a good idea. Let the corporate folks waste their time with meetings, 'selling up' and face-time. By the time a big company has finally OK'd a new effort, a smaller company has tested it, refined it, and re-tested it!

All this calls for embracing risk, though. And you'll have to get comfortable with the notion that from time to time, you will fail. Remember the first time you dove off the high dive at the swimming pool? You slowly mounted the steps to the platform, and inched your way out onto the diving board. You probably chickened out a couple times (I know I did!). In the end though, you finally did it, right? And, wasn't it a kick?

We all approach new things (high dives, marketing plans, etc) with hesitation—because we fear the worst. We envision all the bad things that might happen, without giving due consideration to the wonderful opportunities that could come from the effort. If you

Excepted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"

by Jay B. Lipe

(published in summer '02)

[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make \_\_\_7

tend to focus on the negatives, you MUST change!  
Otherwise, you'll never try new things, and that spells marketing rigor mortis.

Several years ago, I taught classes at a well-known institution in town thinking this would generate leads from growing companies in the area. After a few semesters, I discovered instead that entrepreneurs made up the majority of students, and very few employees from growing companies attended. So, I stopped teaching. You might consider this a marketing failure, right? It didn't achieve my objectives. I invested a lot of time, and didn't acquire any new clients.

Yet, from these classes, I discovered a whole new audience for my line of Special Reports (see the back of the book). I also discovered these classes were a perfect outlet for collecting market feedback to use in writing this book. At the end of each class, I'd open the floor open to the class and ask questions like:

- "Which marketing programs have worked at your company?"
- "Why have they worked so well?"
- "Which marketing programs have flopped?"

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 8

- “If you could do one thing differently for your marketing effort, what would that have been?”

The feedback from these discussions was golden. I learned about market successes and failures. I heard first-hand, which marketing challenges were keeping them up at night. Some of this feedback reinforced what I already knew, but some of it was completely new to me.

So, was teaching these classes a failure? Absolutely not. No, it didn't produce hordes of new clients and mountains of cash, but it did provide me with key insights and knowledge. And I've come to learn, that in today's economy, marketing knowledge is critically important.

Approach failure as a learning experience. These learned lessons will be invaluable at a later date—when you need to revise your marketing efforts or start fresh..

**Mistake #4—Lacking Diligent Follow Through**

One client of mine was in the home-remodeling business. We had very productive discussions throughout the market planning process. He showed a good grasp of business strategies and clearly

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 9

understood how these would translate into his marketing activities. But, all this momentum ground to a halt when we began implementing the marketing plan.

Suddenly, his whole demeanor changed. He endlessly nit-picked at inconsequential issues. He backed out of several marketing events. And most distressing, he couldn't meet a deadline. If he had a short section of copy to write, he'd be weeks late or never turn it in.

I quickly realized this was a fellow who liked to create ideas, but had a real fear of implementing them. This inability to get things 'out the door' means big trouble in the marketing arena. The best marketing plan in the world is useless if it sits on the shelf. How can prospects become customers if they never see anything new from you? You must commit to forward movement in any marketing effort—it's what turns thoughts into actions.

Regularly schedule (in your day-planner if you need to) one hour a week to work on your marketing. Write the first draft of a direct mail letter. Take a prime client out to lunch and ask her 5 basic questions about your business. Take a prime source of referrals out to breakfast and ask him for 2 more.

Excerpted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"

by Jay B. Lipe

(published in summer '02)

[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 10

One hour per week is the bare minimum any company should spend on marketing. If you're a bigger company, try spending 4 hours per week. Each of these efforts results in knowledge that fuels your marketing campaign.

**Mistake #5—Throwing Nickels Around Like They're Manhole Covers**

Don't get me wrong. It's very important to scrutinize where you'll spend your marketing dollars, and what payback you're expecting. But, I've seen businesses take this too far. How do you know you've gone too far?

- You catch yourself always saying "We can't afford that."
- Your vendors are too busy to work with you.
- You start hearing the word "cheap" from customers.
- Even your financial officer is urging you to spend!

Spending a bit more to improve the appearance of a marketing flyer may not result in more immediate business. But it may communicate a more successful image for your company. When that happens, it will pay off in sales and referrals down the road.

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 11

In marketing you must spend money. Because of this, many accountants have an inherent concern with us, yet spending money is necessary to get the market's attention. So, from time to time—splurge. Use an aqueous coating on your next direct mailing. Hire a graphic designer to give your materials a fresh look. Test a 2-color ad instead of 1-color.

These dollars are an investment in your marketing 'bank account'.

**Mistake #6—Resisting the use of a Marketing Plan**

At a marketing trade show once, I surveyed close to 50 business owners. One question I asked was “Do you currently have a marketing plan?” Over 50% of them answered no. Being a devotee of marketing plans, I was astonished.

How could these companies (some of them pretty good-sized) have any confidence in their marketing without a plan? It would be like driving cross-country without a map. Sure, you'd probably get to your final destination, but think of all the detours and dead-ends you'd encounter!

A marketing plan forces you to think ahead and visualize strategic issues for your business like:

- What business are we in?

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 12

- Who are our best customers?
- What benefits do our products/services provide to customers?
- What are our business strengths? What do our customers rave about?
- What do we do better than our competitors?
- Where will future business come from?

When you commit your answers to paper, something profound happens. Suddenly you see quite clearly why you're in business, where you're headed, what makes your company special and why marketing program "A" makes sense while program "B" doesn't.

I'll talk more about the specific steps involved in developing your marketing plan in a later chapter. But whether you use my market planning process, yours, or someone else's, use somebody's! Developing a marketing plan is the foundation of a successful marketing effort.

**Mistake #7—View Marketing as a Miracle Cure**

To my constant surprise (and chagrin), many folks view marketing as the magic answer to their ills. They set off down the marketing road, but just short weeks later—without a 'home run' to their credit—get discouraged and quit the effort.

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 13

Seeking an immediate turnaround to their business fortunes, these folks place one ad and then envision a madhouse of activity as their phones are swamped with callers. Folks, it doesn't happen that way.

Do you know how high the first Mercury Space rocket flew? 4 inches! Immediately after ignition, an engine malfunctioned and the onboard computers shut the engines down, while the rocket descended—a grand total of four inches—back to earth. Did the space program throw in the towel? No. After several more successful (and a few failed) missions, the Mercury program transformed into the Apollo program, which eventually landed humans on the moon—ranking as one of mankind's ultimate achievements.

In most cases, marketing won't save a company. It will only start saving it. As I mentioned earlier, two keys to successful marketing are patience and persistence. This means you may have to wait a while for the full impact of your marketing.

**Mistake #8—Putting all your eggs in one Marketing Basket**

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 14

We've all met one-dimensional people, haven't we? They talk on and on about only one thing. The result? Boring! This is a little like the company that markets only one way to its prospects. What happens? The prospects get bored. Don't let this happen to you.

Instead, seek variety in your marketing attempts. Variety keeps prospects on their toes—wondering what you'll do next. Variety also keeps you front and center in a prospect's mind. By seeing your company in a variety of ways, they'll more easily remember you.

When someone says to me "I've seen your name a lot recently, but I can't remember where," I take this as a compliment. It means we've marketed using a variety of tools, and kept the audience a little off balance.

Variety also helps you get picked up on others' radar screens. A media editor may single you out as an expert after hearing you speak to an audience. A vendor in your industry, after receiving your direct mail piece, may contact you with a referral. A contact in a different industry may tell prospects about you after reading a trade magazine article about your business.

Think of marketing as so many drops of water in a bucket. You'll may never know which drop overturns

the bucket, but each drop does its part. Then, usually when you least expect it, the bucket overturns.

**Mistake #9—Do It All In-House**

Let's face it, when you first start out in business you'll do most of your own marketing. You'll write press releases, design your brochures and even lick the stamps for your direct mail. But over time, your business will grow to where you can't do it all anymore. At this point, you'll have to turn to outsiders and in my opinion, very good things come from this.

Whether it's outside graphic designers, copywriters, marketing consultants or others, outsiders bring several advantages to your business:

- ***Extra arms and legs***

Outsiders help you accomplish more. With their help, you'll launch more programs and complete more projects. As a result, you'll stay in front of your prospects more often.

- ***A View of the Forest***

Some companies we work with hire us because they're too close to the action to see the bigger marketing picture. Or as one of my associates says "They're too busy looking at the bark, to even see the forest." Because they're so caught up in the daily

grind of their business, they need someone who can help them take stock of the big picture. A good outside marketer will keep you focused on the important issues, not just the urgent ones.

- **A Few New Lessons**

Whenever I bring in an outside marketer to work on my business, I usually end up learning far more than I expect to. A good outside marketer stretches your thinking and just might provide a brand new idea or way of thinking.

These people can stretch you on the little things, like your website's format or the color of your logo. Or they'll stretch you on big things, like creating your business mission or targeting a potential market.

But each outsider brings a wealth of marketing experience to your door. This knowledge represents the sum total of their marketing experience and you will be the better for tapping into that knowledge.

**Mistake #10—Say Something One Day, Something Different the Next**

These days, it's estimated each person views over 3,000 marketing messages **per day**. This means your marketing messages will compete with 2,999 other messages that day. So, all your marketing messages

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 17

should be crystal clear. People just aren't listening with 100% attention these days. And, if your messages (including copy, visuals, brand identity and positioning) lack consistency, you're making the prospect work too hard.

Use consistent imagery and messages throughout all your marketing. That way, when prospects are exposed to your marketing efforts, they know it's from you and noone else.

One client of mine is a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis. After reviewing that city's signage (road signs, park signs, vehicle stickers, etc.), I noticed a lack of consistency. Old logos appeared on some signs, while an updated logo was featured on others. Moreover, many police cars and uniforms didn't display any city logo. As a result, when the city police showed up at a resident's house, some residents weren't sure if those cars and officers were really from their suburb! The result was a confusing and inconsistent image for the city as seen through the eyes of the residents.

**Mistake #11—Fail to Emphasize Face-to-Face Marketing**

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 18

If I told you a business' marketing consisted of these elements:

- ❑ Direct Mail
- ❑ Billboards
- ❑ Internet
- ❑ Print Advertising

would you be impressed...or concerned? I'd be concerned. Why? Because all of these marketing efforts are non-personal. They don't involve face-to-face contact between a prospect and the business. That's bad.

These days we're bombarded with ads on television, ads on websites, ads on the radio, ads in the newspaper, ads on buses, ads on cars, ads along the side of the road. Ads, ads, ads. Shoot, we even have ads in our bathrooms, and I hear ads are now appearing inside the urinals!

What do people look for these days? People they can trust. Therefore, your marketing should strive to 'show the company's face' to your prospects. Be human. Be personal. Be a face. If you or your company does any of the following, you're on the right track:

- ❑ Personal Selling
- ❑ Trade Shows

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses

Make 19

- ❑ Networking
- ❑ Open Houses
- ❑ Demonstrations
- ❑ Seminars
- ❑ Workshops
- ❑ Speaking Engagements
- ❑ Presentations

If you're leaving these out of your marketing toolkit you're shortchanging your effort. Give prospects a chance to see the face of your company. If you don't, they'll never know its personality!

**Mistake #12—Closing Your Ears to the Market**

Marketing is about being 'in the market'. A crucial part of that is keeping your ears open. Large companies have the resources to conduct massive market research programs. Yet, many small business owners wrongly assume they can't afford research.

I'd argue two things. First, ongoing market research should be a mandatory part of any small business. And second, all small businesses can afford market research if they just view it creatively.

Each of these is a market research question:

- What are we doing well?
- What could we improve?

Excepted from "*The Marketing Toolkit for Growing Businesses*"

by Jay B. Lipe

(published in summer '02)

[www.emergemarketing.com](http://www.emergemarketing.com) to order

Chapter 2... Top 12 Marketing Mistakes Growing Businesses  
Make 20

- What more can we do for you?

If you ask these questions to three of your customers every quarter, and then listen hard to the answers, you're doing research.

**Remember...**

None of us can avoid all these marketing mistakes. Sometimes, I find myself slipping back into some of them in my marketing business. But just knowing what they are and keeping a watchful eye out for them will make you a better marketer.

**Key Takeaways**

- Work to avoid these common marketing mistakes:
  1. Thinking marketing is advertising
  2. Lacking patience
  3. Fearing failure
  4. Lacking diligent follow through
  5. Throwing nickels around like they're manhole covers
  6. Resisting the use of a marketing plan
  7. Viewing Marketing as a miracle cure
  8. Putting all your marketing eggs in one basket
  9. Doing it all in-house
  10. Saying something one day, something different the next
  11. Failing to emphasize face-to-face marketing
  12. Closing your ears to the market
- Review this list every 6 months.