

# Responsible marketing: How to make a positive impact

 By [Michele Usher](#)

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As a marketing manager, you are accountable for your company's marketing activities and budgets and the high level of decision making that comes with the role. Chief executives trust that you will take this responsibility seriously.

However, careless decision making and irresponsible budget allocations happen all too frequently... Indulgent year-end parties because there's money left over in the budget; last-ditch advertising campaigns that are ineffective because they haven't been thought through carefully enough, or because the marketing manager has handed over too much responsibility to an agency that doesn't understand the brand; irresponsible gifting; environmentally careless processes, and just generally wasteful expenditure are still all-too-common in an industry that is so influential when it comes to leading and shifting public perceptions.

It's time to make responsible marketing practices a priority in every organisation and here are seven easy steps to get you started.

## 1. Treat the marketing budget as if it were your own

When you treat something as your own, you tend to take better care of it. So when considering costs, ask yourself if you can get it cheaper (without sacrificing quality). Ask for discounts, negotiate until you're satisfied that the price you're paying is the same as what you'd be prepared to pay if the money were coming out of your own pocket.

When it comes to year end and you find yourself with budget left over, you may be tempted to spend it due to the "use it or lose it" principle. You may be concerned that your budget will be cut accordingly the following year. But spending just for the sake of it can be irresponsible if it's not part of a sound strategy. By not using up your budget your manager is likely to be more impressed by how much you've saved the company and it will help to build up trust with your executive team, which is important, given that marketing departments are often seen as the big spenders in organisations.

## 2. Treat service providers fairly

Treat your service providers as if they were your clients or your own staff - you never know when they might be. This means being fair (even when they let you down), considerate of their time and respectful of their expertise.

Pay people on time. In many cases we're dealing with small businesses which, if they are not paid on time, could go

out of business.

Be aware of the power differential in the relationship. Yes, as the client we often hold the power, but be aware of it and be careful not to abuse it.

### **3. Reduce marketing's carbon footprint**

Marketing can play a big role when it comes to reducing a company's carbon footprint.

Use environmentally friendly or recycled paper for printing. The quality has improved tremendously and there are many competitively priced options around.

Use local manufacturers and suppliers for promotional items. People appreciate the gesture as they tend to be more original than those that are mass produced in the East.

Construct exhibition stands and activations in a carbon neutral way.

Use less packaging.

Eliminate as much wastage as you can. Don't print huge quantities just because economies of scale bring down the unit price. If you're not going to use the material rather save on the paper and chemicals needed to print.

### **4. Leverage your spend to do good**

Where possible, consider how you could use some of your spend to benefit an individual who's doing great things for his or her community or an NGO.

For example, if you're running an online campaign, allocate some spend to a worthy beneficiary when you reach a particular target. Participants in the campaign will feel like they're making a positive impact and the beneficiary will benefit in a practical way.

Make sure that this part of the campaign is coming from an authentic place within your organisation and makes sense in terms of your marketing strategy.

### **5. Go carefully when it comes to gifting**

Giving and receiving gifts in some industries is fast becoming an unpopular practice. But in others, gifting, which includes entertainment, has become excessive to the point that the lines are blurred between what is a show of appreciation from a service provider and what is essentially a "bribe" to secure more work.

It helps to have a policy in place, which serves as a guideline for what is acceptable and what's not and promotes a culture of transparency. When next you're offered a gift, ask what the value is. If it falls within your limits disclose the gift, its value, and the giver in a register. That way you can prove that your decisions were made for all the right reasons.

### **6. Honesty and integrity**

Make sure your brand communication is done with integrity. This means avoiding misleading advertising, communicating truthfully to customers and keeping your brand promise. It also extends to how you interact with your stakeholders, including the media.

## 7. Educate yourself and your team

There are a number of great "Responsible Marketing" resources available online. Keep up-to-date and encourage your team to do the same. Find ways to ensure responsible practices remain top-of-mind for everyone - you could list it as a standard agenda item at meetings, or send the occasional email reminder. Better yet, sit down with your team and hear their ideas. Their buy-in is crucial to making this part of your marketing culture.

Make responsible marketing practices part of your brand strategy for 2013 and hardwire it into the brand blueprint which should guide everything you do and how you do it.

### ABOUT MICHELE USHER

Michele is Head of Marketing at Futuregrowth Asset Management. She has worked in the marketing environment within the financial services industry for over 20 years and enjoys managing a brand that fosters the principles of Good Money, ie sustainable business and social practices.

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