



#168. Four Marketing Rules I Threw Out (and Why You Might Too)

Have you ever found yourself doing everything the marketing experts told you to do and you're still hearing crickets? Well, I've certainly been there. And after more than 30 years in marketing, from agencies to corporate to running my own business, I finally realized something.

Marketing advice actually ages a bit. Some of it ages well, but a lot of it really doesn't, and some of it just kind of expires. What worked in 2007 doesn't necessarily work in 2026, and some of it was actually never true. Everyone just repeated things that sounded like good advice, and it got repeated so often that people started to believe it and treat it like law.

But one thing I found, even when things work for a large corporation or a particular client, it doesn't necessarily mean it's gonna work with a real small business or with a real budget. So today, I wanna talk you through the marketing advice that I no longer believe. There are four things that I followed for years, some of them I even taught others, that I've since thrown out.

One thing that ties them all together is that these were all taught to me as a universal rule. It was, "This is the right way. Do this and it works." But turns out almost none of it is really universal. Most of it depends on your audience, your budget, your offer, and the moment that you're in right now.

So let's get into what I stopped believing and more importantly, what I do now instead. Okay, old belief number one: you have to make Facebook and Instagram work. Here's one I see quite a bit. Somebody tells me social media doesn't work for their business, and when I dig in, what they really mean is Facebook and Instagram didn't work, and maybe LinkedIn too.

And I get it. When we say social media, what do we think about? We think about Facebook and Instagram and LinkedIn. They're the big names, right? Remember when everybody was on MySpace? Yeah. Those names change, right? But here's the thing. [00:02:00] Instagram has 500 million daily active users, and Facebook has 2.1 billion daily active users.

But those are just two platforms, and if your people aren't hanging out on there, or if the algorithms decided not to show them your stuff, which is highly probable with that many users, that's not social media fail. Those two rooms are maybe the wrong rooms So here's what I do now instead.

Before I assume a client should be on Facebook or Instagram just because everybody is, I ask one question: Where do your people actually spend time? Sometimes it's in a niche Facebook

group or on Pinterest, or honestly, not on social media at all. Social media is just one option in the awareness stage. Is it worth your time to fight the algorithm there?

Maybe, maybe not, but that's a question that you get to decide. There are a lot of social media platforms, some of which are so niche that you probably have never heard of them. So here's what I want you to do. Go to your AI engine of choice and type, "what are some social media sites that," and then insert who your ideal customer is, "is spending time on?" It will give you a whole list of sites where you can build awareness without the big competition that you'd get on Facebook or Instagram. The platform isn't the point. Being where your people already are and sharing something that's gonna get their attention and build a relationship with them, that's what matters.

You don't need to be on more platforms. You need to make sure that you're in the right one. Okay, old belief number two: building an email list is quick and easy. When I started my first business, which was a design agency in the early 2000s, building an email list was pretty easy. I would run an ad on Facebook and feature a freebie.

People signed up, and they were added to my list. Easy peasy. And often I didn't even need to pay for ads. I would just post something on social media, and [00:04:00] that was enough. And sadly, those days are probably over, my friend. Over time, ads got expensive, and people got burned out from downloading information that they didn't necessarily use or wasn't really good or information that some people put out that just wasn't worth an email address.

But now we're at the pinnacle of the information age, and people can find anything and everything out with Claude or Gemini or any AI platform. People are so overwhelmed with information that it makes it hard to even give it away with the price of an email address. Truthfully, building a list can take time or money, but having an email list is still a very beneficial thing for almost every business out there. So my recommendation is to start early.

I made this mistake. I was so focused on my corporate clients that I really neglected my own list for a really long time, and that's hurting me big time in the long run. It was like the story of the cobbler's children who had no shoes, right? Yeah, that's what happened to me. And I understand that you can't go back in time and start your list, but you can start today, so build your list sooner rather than later, and build it like it matters because it really does. Email remains one of the most vital and highest returning communication channels out there. It can earn up to \$45 for every dollar spent on it. It also provides a direct and owned line of communication with your audience. Your email list is something that you own.

Social media is borrowed. I love the phrase never build on rented land, which is exactly what you do when you build your entire business on social media instead of using your email list. I've seen many social accounts go down or get hacked, and then you've lost those potential customers. So here's what I do now.

I stop treating freebies like vending machines, where you just drop in an email address and a PDF pops out. That's the old way, and people are really getting [00:06:00] kinda numb to it. So now I ask myself one question before I make any lead magnet.

Does this actually solve one real problem start to finish? It doesn't work anymore to just share like 12 tips. If you can solve one real problem, that will earn you an email address. So in an age where people can ask AI anything for free, give them a genuine win, and the list will grow because you've earned it.

Okay. Old belief number three, marketing is a funnel

When I first learned about the marketing funnel in school, I was gobsmacked. I thought the funnel was genius. And as a side note, yeah, that's how you know I'm a marketing nerd. What could be easier than making potential customers aware of you and then have them fall down the funnel and become customers?

But that's not how it worked for me. In reality, I had social media followers. I knew lots of people in my community, but very few people actually fell into being a customer. They needed to be nurtured, and sometimes a lot. There was a lot more psychology needed to take a potential customer from, "Here, I have a business," to doing sales with them and then asking them to refer you.

So much so that I threw out my funnel and created something that's a lot more realistic and that actually worked in my business. I call it the trail to the sale. I've modified it over the years, but my current version has eight steps on an easy-to-follow pathway.

The first step is awareness, that top-of-funnel place where people find out about you and draw your ideal customer in. Social media is in that area, Google search, ChatGPT, networking events, speaking, podcasts, even one of those magnetic car stickers. These are all potential awareness events.

Next step is the consideration stage. This is where you can continue to nurture that relationship through email, but who knows how that will change in the future. The [00:08:00] consideration stage is anywhere on your website or in your information or even just a conversation with you where they can find out more about your business.

The compare stage is how you line up with your competition. That might be a Google review or just really making sure that your unique value proposition is something that is really standing out to your customer and that they know that you're not just a commodity item.

The evaluate stage, which is where your ideal customer can try you out with a trialed version, a discount, or a small purchase. The sell stage is where your customer buys from you, so hooray for that. The supersize stage, where you can upsell that client to maybe something else that they need or maybe the next best thing.

The serve stage is where you handle that client after the sale, because that's so important. And then the send stage is finally when you ask others to refer you to their friends. This process made my marketing so much clearer and easier. I go into depth and teach the entire system in my Modern Marketing Mastery class.

So instead of asking, "What should I do for marketing?" I now ask, "Where is my customer on the trail to the sale, and what they need to know next?" It works because it's built on human behavior rather than marketing trends or tactics. That one shift changed everything, and it's now what I use for my corporate clients as well.

Okay, moving on. Old belief number four: There's a single right and wrong way to do marketing. My marketing route started in college when I had my first advertising course. I was hooked.

It was something about the meeting of things that I love so much, being design, writing, and psychology, and the thing that would go make my dad the most proud, which was business. After all, he was paying the tuition. I'm not gonna lie, there was a bit of glamour attached with a career in advertising, especially as an art director, which is where I was headed.

I had learned the secret to success in [00:10:00] college in any 101 class, in this case it was advertising 101, is the thorough knowledge of a textbook. So I memorized that thing, and it served me really well. When I got done with college, I got a job in the marketing department of an upscale retailer, and then eventually I got an art direction job that I dreamed of at an agency, all the while following the same list of what makes good marketing from my textbooks. And it worked really well until it didn't.

When we moved our young family to a college town in Wisconsin, I no longer had an agency name to hide behind or more experienced marketers to look up to. But I had book knowledge, and I was really pretty confident in that. But the new startups and small businesses I was working with in the smaller community really lacked what I had access to in the bigger city, clients with deep pockets and top-of-the-line resources.

So I had to get scrappy and creative. People in that small community depended on word-of-mouth marketing more than anything else. That's not something that big corporate clients even measure. Also, I found that xeroxing a flyer and distributing it to friends or posting it at a coffee shop had actually more impact than a glossy magazine ad.

Here's the thing, none of these things were in my marketing textbook or taught in my marketing classes, nor were they used by the big retailer or the agency I worked for. But the thing I want you to remember is that marketing, especially in the awareness stage, can look very different.

There really are no rules. It's a matter of getting the word about your business to your potential customer so that you can meet a need or an aspiration that they have. That's it. But there's a couple of other things I want you to remember. Number one, all marketing requires testing. No

guru, nobody selling ad space, no expert in marketing, me included, can tell you with 100% certainty of what will work for your offer and your audience. I wish I could, right? That would [00:12:00] make marketing so much easier.

The other thing is having a limited budget can force you to be creative. When I'm working with clients, I really encourage them to think outside the box. What can you do with what you have right now? So here's what I do now instead of hunting for the right way to market my business. I pick one thing, I test it small, and I let the results tell me what works.

Not a textbook, not a guru, the results. The numbers tell a story. If a scrappy little email outperforms a big fancy campaign, and sometimes it does, the email wins. Your job is not to do marketing correctly, it's to find what works for your people and do more of that. I had one client who wanted to target teachers, so she printed off flyers and put them on the cars of the parking lot of an elementary school, and it worked for her. You just don't know what's gonna work until you test it and find out.

Okay, so those are four easy things I've changed my mind on because truthfully, marketing is always changing as people get used to new things, get tired of the old things, and technology evolves. And I want you to know that if you're holding onto these things or any beliefs that are not working for you, you have my permission to change what you're doing.

Because truthfully, marketing is not a rule book. It's a relationship with real people who change their minds, who get overwhelmed, and they buy when they're ready. So today was a short one, but thanks for hanging out with me.

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