

# Warning: Dangerous Marketing Myths!

A Commentary for Marketing for Dummies Readers  
by Alex Hiam

If you are working on a marketing plan or program, I recommend that you take a moment to consider some of the common myths of marketing.

There are a lot of widespread beliefs about marketing that are, to be blunt, *just plain wrong*. People will tell you these myths in the hope of being helpful, but if you allow yourself to believe them, you are likely to run into trouble.

So here's my contribution: My effort to dispel the most dangerous and widespread marketing myths.

**First myth: Marketing and selling are different things.** In truth, all great marketing is about selling and often includes face-to-face sales as well as advertising and any other means needed to bring in the business. In many traditional companies, the marketing department is separate from the sales department, and so it seems that sales and marketing are not always one. But when they don't act as one, the company's revenues and profits suffer.

My books reflect an integrated view of sales and marketing to help you use the best techniques and tools for the situation - regardless of what they are conventionally termed. I start by focusing on tools and techniques for effective face-to-face selling and move on to approaches that operate more at arms' length. In great marketing, the same principles apply no matter how you choose to inform and persuade your prospective customers. You need to use whatever means best fit the moment.

That's what an old-fashioned specialty foods store discovered when its building was destroyed in a fire. The store is located in a quiet New England town, which might just explain why it's called Duck Soup. Duck Soup's customers were loyal, and the atmosphere was personal and friendly. You could count on the store to keep your favorite oddities in stock, and to make sure that you left the store in a better mood than when you came in.

But then came the fire. And the owners faced a minimum delay of six months before they could reopen. How to keep in touch with their customers and keep Duck Soup's spirit alive in the interim?

The tale is picked up by Inc. Technology magazine, which featured a story on the business that opened with these lines: "Duck Soup's banner ad differs from other banner ads in three ways. First, it is seven feet long by three feet high and made of vinyl. Second, it is pinned to a chain-link fence along Route 20, the sole commercial thoroughfare in the country-quiet town of Sudbury, MA. And third, it is actually driving people to Duck Soup's Web site." (*Inc. Tech* 1999, No. 4.)

The site's purpose was "to keep a beloved store alive in its customers' thoughts" according to Leigh Buchanan, *Inc. Tech's* editor and one of many customers who needed that lifeline when her favorite store burned down. That so-called banner ad is not a rectangle of

purchased space on some popular Web site, but actually a traditional sign stuck on the fence surrounding the construction site which will house the new store.. It said simply, “What’s Up at Duck Soup? Find out at [www.quackquackquack.com](http://www.quackquackquack.com).”

This story illustrates the flexibility and ingenuity needed to nurture customer relationships and build a strong presence in any market. If you fall prey to the myth that marketing and sales don’t mix, you’ll have a hard time being as adaptable as this marketer was.

**Second Myth: Marketing is a set of formulas and rules that deliver successful sales.** In truth, marketing doesn’t really have any rules. Each new marketing success makes its *own* rules. And only when you’re willing to enter upon the adventure of invention will you discover what marketing is truly about.

Certainly there is much to be learned about marketing, and many useful tools and techniques to add to your repertoire. But you must put them to work in your own way, and no one can tell you exactly what that should be.

**Third Myth: Marketing can be learned by studying it in school.** I’ve taught thousands of business students in introductory marketing and advertising classes, but I’m afraid that none of them were ready to go forth and do great marketing.

That academic knowledge base, while valuable in principle, is of no consequence until you add to it a practical education in the trenches of marketing.

Because success in marketing is as much about getting things done as it is about thinking or planning what to do.

Often the things you need to get done are difficult things like designing a great ad or letter, making a great sales pitch, or developing and positioning a new product offering. There’s a great deal of craft in the field of marketing, and little of that craft can be learned in school.

Some people are amazingly skilled at getting a company’s name or product in the media. Others have a remarkable facility for designing Web sites. Still others create logos, letterheads, and business cards that help you stand out from the pack. There’s really no end to the many specialized crafts within the field of marketing.

Yet to be a good all-around marketer, you need to be able to use all of these specialists’ tools yourself in a pinch, and, when funding permits, you must know enough of their craft to select and manage the experts well.

There’s a lot to know about marketing if you want to do it really well. Yet many of the people I meet and work with in business seem to know remarkably little about marketing.

I’m often startled by how little knowledge executives and business owners seem to have. Similarly, I meet many people who have been assigned a staff position in marketing for the first time and must do something incredibly difficult like run an ad campaign or write the next marketing plan — and in truth, they know almost nothing of the field. It’s a little scary. But that’s the sort of

problem the *For Dummies* books were  
invented to solve!