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Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

The Temple Moneychangers

A Guide to Biblical Marketing

Business people in Jesus' day did not have government organizations to watch over the way they marketed products; the labels they used on foods, or the claims they made about the products they sold. But that certainly doesn't mean the Bible is silent on the subject of biblical principles for marketing.

Jesus took offense to men who were selling animals for sacrifice at the temple for usury prices. He strode up to them, overturned their tables, and drove them out of the temple area saying, *"My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a 'den of robbers'"* (Matt 21:13). Even in those days, there were marketers anxious to take advantage by making false product claims in order to make huge profits at the expense of others.

Before we get too far we should understand what role marketing has in business. Ask the person on the street and the answer you'll get is often "selling" or "advertising." More than a few corporate employees will offer the same answer.

While these answers are not completely incorrect they are only a part of the marketing function. Simply put, marketing is the sum total of the efforts needed to bring a product to market. The American Marketing Association established a more formal definition: *"Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promoting, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges which satisfy individual and organizational objectives."* Clearly marketing is more than just "selling" or "advertising."

Based on the role of marketing in business, one can focus on a number of topics for which biblical principles should be considered in our marketing efforts. Dr. Wayne Talarzyk, Professor of Marketing at Ohio State University, has identified seven:

- 1. Social.** To what extent should companies be involved in promoting social change?



2. **Market research.** What are appropriate uses for market research; the accumulation of data?
3. **Market segmentation.** Should a business serve all market segments regardless of potential return on investment? Should a business purposely provide special treatment or perhaps unequal treatment based on geography, ethnic differences, or religious affiliations?
4. **Product design.** Should a business build expensive equipment into a product for safety (seatbelts, airbags, etc.)? Where does a business draw the line at under-designing a product to save costs? Should a business provide products that people want but may do harm (alcohol, automatic weapons, cigarettes, etc.)?
5. **Pricing decisions.** Should a business charge different prices for essentially the same product because it is sold in different channels? Should a marketer advertise the economy model and then try to switch customers to more expensive equipment? Should a marketer either flood a market with product at low prices to put a competitor out of business or withhold product to create shortages that will raise prices?
6. **Distribution.** Should a business restrict the sale of its products through certain channels or retailers? Is it proper to sell your products only through channels that yield maximum profit, while ignoring channels that have a need but are less profitable to service?
7. **Advertising and sales claims.** Should a business exaggerate the claims of performance for their products in the media, on the package, or directly, through their sales people? Should a salesperson try to sell a product to someone that doesn't really need the item or can't afford it, just to make a sale?

Framework for Marketing Ethics

There was a commercial running on TV for frankfurters in which a young employee is discussing how the ingredients can be cheapened while maintaining legal standards for frankfurters, when suddenly a booming voice-over announces, "You're dealing with a higher power." Silly? Perhaps. But this commercial illustrates an important point for the marketer; there is the legal obligation and then there is our obligation to God. The legal obligation should be viewed as the bare minimum, but there is also an obligation to God's, and *He* is the higher power!

Our society has "evolved" to the point where we have hundreds of thousands of laws in tens of thousands of books, all designed to enforce the Ten Commandments. Beyond the law, many professional organizations have their "code of ethics." In addition, most companies have internal policy guides. Each of these – the law, the codes of ethics, and the policy manuals – are attempting to regulate behavior within certain "acceptable" boundaries. As Christians in the



marketplace, we need to meet these standards as a bare minimum and strive to always attain God's standards.

Getting Started

The best way we can meet God's standards is to understand the basic Biblical principles that apply to marketing. Here are twelve principles you can use as marketing guidelines:

Love God and Serve Him. The primary question we should ask ourselves is, "Is what I am doing bringing honor and glory to God?"

A Pharisee lawyer asked Jesus, "*Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?*" To which Jesus answered, "*Love the Lord your God with all your soul and all your heart. This is the first and greatest commandment*" (Matt 22:36-37).

Obey the Law. Many scriptures relate to the way we are to obey man's law. Paul instructed the Christian church at Rome to submit to the governing authorities *because "they are also God's servants."* Paul went on to say that we should pay taxes if we owe them, and to give respect and honor where due (Romans 13:1-7).

In the Sermon On the Mount, Jesus said, "*If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles*" (Matt 5:41). It was the custom in those days that a Roman soldier could require a citizen to carry their loads for a mile. Jesus is saying that we should not only accept this first mile but go an additional mile.

Love Others. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres*" (1 Cor. 13:6-7).

Paul does not make an exception for customers or clients. We are to love everyone. And that love should manifest itself in the way we treat others. Customers should be able to trust the claims we make for our products. They should have faith in our guarantees.

Finally, love perseveres. This means that you should care about the people you do business with not just at the moment of sale, but all the time, for the long-term.

Be Honest. Leviticus says clearly, "*Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another*" (Lev 19:11).

The commandments not to steal or lie are pretty clear and come as no surprise, but the area of deception is a little tougher to deal with for the marketer.

For example, we should not make claims that are difficult for our customers to understand.



We should not downsize the weight of a package of goods while leaving the package the same size. This practice has become very prevalent in the food industry. Haven't you ever wondered why that bag of potato chips doesn't serve as many people as it used to? Simple. The product weight keeps getting reduced to keep the retail price at a certain point.

Don't Show Partiality. Proverbs 28:21 says, *"To show partiality is not good."* Paul commands Timothy to *"keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism"* (1 Tim 5:21).

For the marketer, this means allowing all customers equal access to product and making sure that promotions are available to all customers on fair and equal terms.

Be at Peace With Others. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, *"Live in peace with one another"* (1 Thess. 5:13).

For the marketers, this means that we should do all we can to resolve differences between us, our customers, and our suppliers.

Fill Others' Needs. Ephesians tells us to be *"imitators of God"* (Eph. 5:1). Jesus instructs the disciples saying, *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him"* (Matt 6:8).

As marketers, we should try to fill the needs of our customers. Not perhaps the *wants*, but certainly the *needs*. That means that we should build safety into products: seat belts, 5-mile per hour bumpers, airbags, dolls without metal parts, etc.

Be Compassionate. Colossians 3:12 tells us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

As marketers, we should be sympathetic to our suppliers and customers' situations. We should not, therefore, take advantage of the difficulties of our suppliers or our customers. If a company is struggling financially we should not take advantage of them, but deal with them with a heart full of compassion.

Don't Love the Things Of The World. John writes, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:12).

As marketers, we need to consider the role we play in developing and preparing products for the market. Are we making products that meet people's needs or are we developing products that influence customers to store up treasures on earth rather than in heaven?

Develop A Ministry. Paul wrote to Archippus, *"See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord"* (Col. 4:17). Jesus commanded the disciples to *"go and make disciples of*



all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

Jesus granted no special exemption to marketers. The Great Commission applies to all of us.

Therefore, we should make our work our ministry. As business people, we have the opportunity to do the work that the Father gave us every day as we provide a living testimony of our faith.

Ask for Wisdom. There are many areas of business in which it is difficult to know how to apply a Biblical principle.

In these cases, we need to ask for God’s wisdom. James wrote, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5). The verse does not say you will get wisdom sometimes or occasionally, but that God will give it generously to all who ask. What a comfort it is to know that even if we have gotten ourselves into trouble, we can ask God for wisdom in dealing with this and every other situation.

Have a “Right Heart.” James writes, *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says”* (James 1:22). While the world may suggest that you should always look out for number one, the Bible provides many exhortations against being selfish, lovers of self, or double-minded.

As marketers, we must avoid worldly values and focus on being selfless, lovers of all people, and doers of the word.

One Final Thought

Christian marketers have a responsibility that goes far beyond man’s law and the rules of professional associations. It is incumbent upon us to always be a light to the world. We must consider everything we do and the impact that action has on all the people around us. It is an immense responsibility and one that should not be taken lightly.

But there is satisfaction knowing that we run our business being responsible to God for our results and it is this thought that should guide us through every day.

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