

The deadly dozen.

Twelve things you should never say in your commercials or ads.



The survival of some copy clichés is amazing when you consider that they are unlikely to produce sales and – at least in a couple of cases – probably drive business away.

That's not to say that the tried and true should be abandoned. "Guaranteed. Period." will work as long as Lands' End is well-respected. At the other end of the respectability spectrum, "Half-price off this week only" will be an effective way to separate the gullible from their money for a long time to come.

There are, however, some hallowed chestnuts that are ineffective at best, and positively counterproductive at their worst. Here are twelve:

1. "We're remodeling to serve you better," or "A new \$1-million facility coming soon!"

Anyone with a triple-digit IQ will reach the logical conclusion that the business is presently serving customers inadequately. Otherwise why go to the trouble and expense of remodeling? It's fine to trumpet "New, improved!" after the job is done, but while reconstruction/expansion/ renovation is a work in progress, calling attention to it simply calls attention to the present inadequacies and the inconvenience of buying there before needed improvements are made and while the work is still going on.

2. "Building for the future."

A recent set of Ford ads featured Bill Ford talking about the company's five-year plan to improve quality, safety, fuel economy and environmental compatibility. Great. But what about prospects

who want to buy a car today? The spokes-scion effectively admitted that Ford's present products are defective.

3. "We'll match the competition's price."

Then, if price is the only determinant, customers might as well buy from the competition in the first place. Basically, a company that makes this claim is saying "We'll soak you for as much as we can unless you go to the trouble of finding a lower price somewhere else."

4. In fact, "the competition" is a phrase that shouldn't be used at all.

That's the company speaking in its own terms. To prospective customers, the "competition" is really "options." And all marketing communications should be from the prospects' perspective.

5. "Why go anywhere else?" invites an answer the advertiser might not like. The simplest is "Why not?" Marketing communications is supposed to provide an irresistible reason to patronize a company, not a lame challenge to the prospect to think up a reason not to.

6. "Where the customer comes first."

Somehow, we suspect that most customers realize that a company trying to sell them a product or service is trying to make a profit, not perform a

public service. And that profit motive is what really comes first.

7. "23 locations for your convenience."

Actually, most customers don't need or want 23 locations. They want one where it's convenient for them. One thing this claim does is say: "No need to stop here. We have so many outlets you'll probably come across another soon." And when you don't, you can go to a competitor.

8. "Official socket wrench of the NFL."

Who cares. NASCAR seems to be able to generate sales for its official sponsors. But being the official anything of any other event is a total waste of money. Does anyone on the face of this planet believe that being the official sponsor is an indication of anything but a willingness to write a check for the "honor?"

9. "Our 25th anniversary."

Once again, who cares? That's the company talking about itself, not a benefit that might motivate a prospect to buy.

10. "The tightest ship in the shipping industry."

Talking about what a company does well is irrelevant. What's important is talking about what it does for customers.

11. "A community benefactor."

That's nice. Really, it is nice. It just doesn't motivate people to buy. Possible exception: if a company sponsors a Little League team parents might buy from it during the season. This is not to say companies shouldn't do good things for the community. Only that they shouldn't confuse good deeds with good marketing. We've seen a ton of research showing that people appreciate companies' community beneficence, then buy the product that has a more tangible benefit for them.

12. "A family company for five generations."

How nice for you. Why would a prospect care?

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