

# ***MUDDLED, MEAGER AND MESSY***

Marketing performance  
repair manual  
for small business



by Wendy Moore-MacQueen

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**This book is dedicated to my husband and lovely daughter who have both put up with years of not being able to watch television or go for a drive in the city without a running stream of advertising critique in their ears. Their support and encouragement have always been appreciated.**

**And to my good friend, Paul. He can make me laugh my head off even on days when I can't remember why I do this for a living.**



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## **If experience means anything**

It breaks my heart when I see small business owners floundering around with their marketing. It inevitably winds up being confusing, too much or too little and more times than not very, very messy.

Too often I meet with small business owners who lament their small marketing budgets yet spend money in nonsensical places.

Small business owners are in the business they are in because they are good at it. So concentrate on what you do best and bring in experts in the fields where you have no education, training or experience. You bring in lawyers to handle your legal matters, don't you? And accountants to make sure you are getting all the tax breaks possible? So why try to handle your marketing – arguably one of the most important elements to growing your business – all by yourself?

In ***muddled, meager and messy***, I've tried to share my years of experience helping small business find their voice and deliver messages that prompt customers to engage. Of course, once you get a chance to interact with your customer, your sales team needs to be spot-on. Marketing is just the top of the sales funnel – it can't make your sales for you.

So sit back, gather up all the marketing knowledge you can from this book, and then, maybe, actually use it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Moore-MacQueen', with a stylized, cursive script.

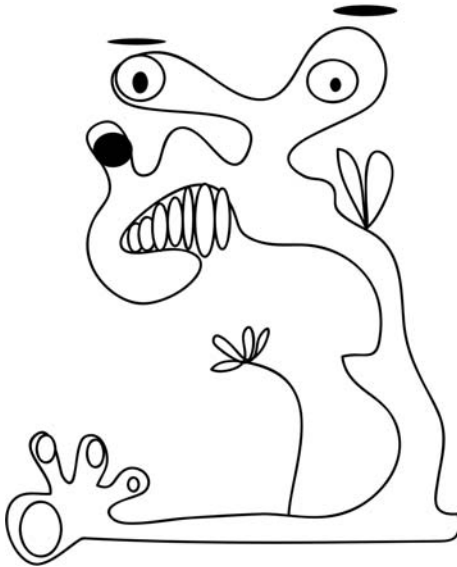
Wendy Moore-MacQueen



# 1

## Tackling the gremlins in the room

There's a dazzling array of behaviours small business owners exhibit in an attempt to save money on their marketing. Many of them may look like a savings in terms of dollars spent, however if you truly analyze their impact on your traffic, customer trust and overall image they may not be so economical.



Let's take a look at some of these gremlins and don't be afraid to admit you have some of these monsters in your room. Behaviours can be modified and nobody needs to know you learned it from a book.

**Gremlin #1 – I have a desktop publishing program so I do all my creative design myself (or my brother's kid does it for the same reason).**

The reality is your customer measures your professionalism by the look and tone of your marketing

materials. Unless you are a not-for-profit organization getting some *pro bono* work done, you generally get the quality you pay for.

Now this doesn't mean you have to hire a graphic designer billing out at \$150 per hour. If you are fortunate enough to have a community college or university nearby with a design course, you can probably find some great talent willing to work for a lot less just to pad their portfolios. And you get the bonus of the student's energy and enthusiasm in finding creative ways to get your message out to your customer.

There are also some brilliant independent designers working out of their homes. This scenario saves you money, but you'll want to be careful to review their portfolio and get some references. There are lots of reasons designers might choose to work from home, but they aren't always good ones. Some of them are independent because they can't get a job – which may put them in the same category as your brother's kid and his desktop publishing program.

However, I have worked with some extraordinarily talented designers who have, after working in New York and Toronto, chosen to leave the rat-race and share their skills in an environment they can control. And there are some terrific folks who work from home so they can spend more time with their families. Both good reasons.

Finding these designers may be a chore because they tend not to advertise. If you see some great marketing materials, there's no harm in asking who created it. Most

people, unless they're your competitor, are happy to share contact information.

Designing and writing effective marketing and advertising materials is an art and a discipline. How to use language that inspires your customer, picking colours that deliver the right emotion and getting it all in the right place isn't as easy as it looks. I suppose there's the ego stroke when someone says they saw the ad you designed in your basic desktop publishing program. But your marketing isn't really about your ego – which is actually Gremlin #2.

### **Gremlin #2 – My business is all about me!**

Let's be clear right now. Your business isn't about you. It's about your customers.

This monster covers a whole host of behaviours.

First, re-read Gremlin #1. Compliments are nice, no question. But just because someone commented on seeing your self-designed advertising doesn't mean they liked it. Or that it was effective. If you have a personal design stake in the marketing materials, you lose the ability to look at them objectively. And you lose the ability to hear anyone when they make recommendations.

Secondly, your customers are not you. I've lost count of the number of small business owners who select their marketing tactics based on their personal preferences.

For example, you sell bicycles and you listen to talk radio. Are people who are in the market for a bicycle actually

listening to talk radio? In Canada, talk radio's audience tends to be more senior – way more senior. Yes, seniors are a heck of a lot more active than they used to be so you may get a couple sales from this. But here are a couple of considerations:

- ◇ Seniors have a much shorter life span left than a younger audience and once they're gone who knows about your business?
- ◇ Will a couple of sales pay for the price of the advertising or the rent or the telephone bill, etc? You might want more return on your investment.
- ◇ Just because you like both bicycles and talk radio, does that actually mean all people who like bicycles like talk radio?

You get the point (and more on what your customer likes in a later chapter).

Thirdly, unless you are a fabulous speaker, don't voice your own radio ads. This, again, is a talent and a discipline. Yep, it's great fun to be driving along the road, listening to the radio and suddenly hearing your own voice. And there's such a thrill when an acquaintance says, "Hey, I heard you on the radio!" But seriously, if you sound all mumbley and uncomfortable, how on earth does this deliver a message of confidence and professionalism to your customer that is trying to decide between buying with you or your competitor?

And finally, and so, so importantly, hanging your business' marketing on your face and name is a mess waiting to happen. Not to be rude (or at least no ruder than I've been so far) one day you're going to die. And then what? I suppose since you're dead it doesn't matter to you what your business has to go through to find a new brand and message. And I suspect it's going to be a while before we have the technology to speak from beyond the grave. I had a client once, who shall remain nameless for obvious legal reasons, who wanted to be the 'face' of his business. A real Dave Thomas wannabe. (Dave Thomas was the owner of Wendy's restaurants and was its spokesperson for years and years. He was a brilliant spokesman and delivered a warm, comfortable, honest message. And then he died. Wendy's marketing just hasn't cut the mustard ever since.)

This particular client was in the children's education business and wandered around putting a 'Dr.' in front of his name. However, there was no evidence that he had a doctorate in anything – no diplomas on the wall, no great university stories and no comment when asked what school he attended. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, some clever folks at one of the business schools suggested he should emulate Dave Thomas and become the face of the business.

Can you imagine the repercussions if the competition found out that the 'face' of the company was a sham and didn't have the right to put 'Dr.' in front of his name? There was no question this client's ego got in the way of his business. He had to voice his own radio ads (and way

too many people said he sounded like a villain) and had to be the centre of attention at all times.

Moral of this story? If you really truly have to be the face of your business, make sure you're darned good-looking, have a great voice and demeanour and don't make any claims that can't be substantiated. Your ego will get more than a bruising when your competition mocks you or sends you to court for misrepresentation.

### **Gremlin #3 – Everyone's doing it. I should too.**

Big ugh on this one. Some think if your competitors are all doing the same thing that must be where the audience is. Sometimes true. So investigating the value of these tactics has merit.

However, and this is a big however, doing the same thing just makes you one of the crowd, not unique, not interesting.

At some point you opened your business because you had an idea that was new and different. It may have, on the surface, been similar to what others were doing, but there was a hook that made you think you could do it better or differently.

You need to look at your marketing the same way. How can you do it better or differently?

Finding new avenues to present your message to your customer is a good direction. Small business tends to be caught up in traditional marketing tactics. They're easier

and well-tried. But when you do something new, or even make a creative and clever use of traditional tactics, you stand out in the crowd. You get attention. And believe it or not, your customers appreciate the effort you made to get their attention.

Of course for this to be successful, you must really know your customer. We'll follow up this train of thought later.

#### **Gremlin #4 – Any publicity is good publicity.**

This bugaboo has always grated on me. You hear this all the time as people excuse bad marketing outcomes.

Yes, you want everyone to know about your company. But you want them to know good things, not bad things. Being in the news because of a lawsuit might get you more notoriety than you ever had before, but a lawsuit isn't a positive message.

**Your business isn't about you. It's about your customer.**

And getting news stories about false advertising isn't good publicity either. Of course it creates some chatter even if it isn't happy chatter.

In the age of the Internet, stories stay around for a very long time. Not like the old days when, once the newspaper became the bottom liner in the birdcage, everyone forgot about the story and moved on.

Please keep in mind you represent your business and its brand at all times. And try to encourage your employees

to understand this too. There's no good publicity in being out in public and behaving like a drunken, raving idiot around people who know what you do for a living. The whispers about your behaviour will include your company name at least half the time and how you act affects your customers' opinion of how you do business. Fair? Probably not. But true. (And this is just an example. I'm not condoning or encouraging drunken, raving idiocy at any time.)

Think about your local politicians. I'm sure some advisor has actually said the words, "Any publicity is good publicity". But you know your opinion of the professionalism and skill of your local politicians is coloured by everything you hear and read. Why would your customers act any differently about your business?

**Gremlin #5 – I don't have the money to pay a professional advisor.**

Yes, you do. And in some cases, you can't afford not to. Marketing communications advisors often work at different levels and therefore their pricing comes at different levels. You want just a consultation? That's one price. You want an actual marketing plan? That's a different price.

Do your research and find those folks who have the experience, training and knowledge to guide you. You don't have to let them do everything, just fill in the blanks in your experience, training and knowledge.

And re-read Gremlin #1.

You successfully budget to pay your accountant every year. You can also budget to have a marketing communications consultant or a graphic designer or a professional writer. You just have to budget for it. And one would hope you hire someone who increases your bottom line so they pay for themselves in the long run.

