

THE FIRE TIME MAGAZINE PRESENTS

The Marketing Playbook

HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE IN THE HEARTH & BBQ INDUSTRIES

THINK SMALL TO WIN BIG

Learn what it takes to stand out from all of the noise around you.

HOW TO BUILD A BRAND

Understand how to make your brand spread like wildfire in the marketplace.

3 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Save thousands of dollars in wasted money by avoiding these pitfalls.



author's note

If you're responsible for marketing content, you know that everything gets measured for a return on investment—especially your performance.

This means that every marketing campaign you create needs to have a message that sticks so that customers are inspired to take action. The problem is that many companies in our industry miss creating an effective message with their marketing because of three critical mistakes.

The result is that money is wasted and customers buy from competitors.

If you can build your brand with the principles below—*while avoiding the three mistakes that most companies make*—you will look like a marketing genius to everyone in your company.

I know that this guide can help you create amazing marketing materials to reach businesses and consumers for your company.

To your success,



Tim Reed
EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
THE FIRE TIME MAGAZINE



Part 1:

THINK SMALL TO WIN

One of the pivotal mistakes that we make with our marketing is thinking big. It's easy to wonder, *"How can I make my brand reach the masses?"* Or *"How do we get the most impressions in this advertising campaign?"*

These are good questions when selling soap or toilet paper—commodity goods that are bought repeatedly by everyone regardless of demographic—but they're not beneficial for what we do.

If you sell fireplaces or BBQs, the truth is that you don't want the masses—*your product isn't for them.*

You want the few: the few who have a problem that your product solves, and, most importantly, the *fewer* who have both the ability and the motivation to purchase what you sell.

To win big in marketing, *the secret is to think small.*

Who is your product for?

Don't think in demographics—"men above 40 with a household income of \$120,000" doesn't count.

Who is your product for? *"My neighbor Susie, who always hosts happy hour for the neighbors in her cul-de-sac."* Or *"My brother-in-law Stan, who bought three BBQs in the last five years because they keep giving out."* Or, in the B2B space, *"My dealer Fred in Milwaukie, WI that is getting crushed by the big guy in town."* Now you're onto something.

What would get Susie to buy your fireplace? What would make Stan consider your BBQ or help Fred win market share by selling more of your products?

These are the questions that thinking small will allow you to answer.

If you live in Portland, OR, where the metropolitan area population is around

2,500,000, you shouldn't be concerned about what percentage you can reach in your winter marketing campaign. Rather, you should be concerned with how to reach the 2,500 people (.001%) who may be in the market for a fireplace during those months.

Thinking big means creating a "safe" message for everyone. And a message for everyone is a message for no one.

Thinking small creates a message for the .001%—the .001% who will spend well over \$12,000,000 on your products this winter.

Now, if you've made it this far, you have to be thinking, *"Ok, so how do I reach this .001% who will actually buy my products? How can my message be so specific, yet still effective at scale?"* These are precisely the right questions to ask. These are the questions that thinking big doesn't allow you to even consider.

Crafting a message for the .001% and deploying it effectively will skyrocket your sales and make you look like a genius. In addition, after you've sold to the .001%, you can keep selling to them—and *their friends*—because they understand your value and trust you to deliver.

Remember, a message for everyone is a message for no one. Think small to win big.



**think
small
to win
big**

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Part 2:



HOW TO GROW A BRAND THAT SPREADS LIKE WILDFIRE

I'm sure you know that the strongest brands sell the most products: Coke, BMW, Home Depot, and Starbucks certainly sell more than RC Cola, Elio Motors, Outdoor Supply Hardware, and Blue Bottle Coffee Company.

Now, many businesses in our industry make the mistake of using one of these companies as a model to build their own brands—and the result is that they waste thousands and thousands of dollars while slipping into obscurity with their customers.

The truth is that most people regularly drink soda, most people buy multiple cars in their lifetime, most people frequently purchase at a hardware store, and most people drink coffee often.

However, most people *don't* buy a fireplace more than once (if ever), and most people *don't* buy a BBQ that's over \$500.

In addition, the majority of brands that have become a household name were built by flooding the marketplace with millions and millions of dollars in advertising each year for decades, and those companies had to wait years before seeing a return on that investment—*something that our industry does not have the time or resources to do.*

Using one of these companies as a model for your branding is a mistake that will cost you dearly.

To grow a brand that stands apart in our industry, we need to understand three things:

1. Branding is what people say about your company when you're not in the room.
2. Solving your customer's problems is the key to growing a top-tier brand.
3. Your brand leaks—and it must be refilled often.

If you keep these three things in mind, you'll find that your marketing works better than everyone else's—because they are fixated on trying to copy what made these national chains famous.

1. Branding is what people say about your company when you're not in the room.

For any company in our industry, the quickest (and cheapest) way to grow your brand is through the B2B channel—i.e., your dealers.

After all, dealers are your primary customer before consumers, they sell your products with frequency, and you know exactly how to reach them.

Jeff Bezos says, "*Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room.*" He couldn't be more correct.

How does this apply to your business?

The truth is that in our industry, most dealers would never repeat the "brand" messages that have been churned out for years by marketing teams when asked to talk about a particular manufacturer. The reason is simple: messaging to dealers hasn't been consistent enough to communicate any kind of cohesive brand message.



If you want to take control of your brand, don't worry about coming up with the cleverest advertising slogan (*a silly pun or a play on words, for instance*). Instead, create the clearest description of what your customers need to do to solve the problems that they face—and do it over and over again.

Understanding this will skyrocket the effectiveness of your marketing and grow your brand like crazy.

2. Solving your customers' problems is the key to growing a top-tier brand.

The best part about building a brand in our industry is that it doesn't take millions of dollars in advertising; it just takes a commitment to consistently solving your customers' problems over time.

Since the dealer channel is the quickest way to grow brand equity and market share, think about the biggest problems that these companies face in the marketplace.

For years, I ran five retail stores in the Pacific Northwest. Since then, I've traveled the country working with businesses, so I know that the problems most dealers have are very similar:

- “Not enough customers are coming into my store.”
- “I don’t know which product lines will help me sell more.”
- “It’s really complicated to write up estimates for my products.”
- “I can’t seem to sell against [Brand X] in this category.”
- “I’m nervous about laying off team members in the off-season.”
- “My suppliers don’t deliver consistently.”
- “These products are getting more and more difficult to sell.”

Recently, I went to the East Coast to work with a couple of retailers, and they were each struggling with the same set of problems.

As we analyzed both their showrooms and local marketplaces, I suggested that each company add a specific product line to their mix (in one case, it was a gas fireplace line, and in the other, it was a wood stove line). The reason was that each respective product line had an un-shoppable value wedge that nothing else in their market could touch. Not only that, but we could use this value wedge to create a sales message that was simple to digest and easy for their team to communicate.

After explaining this to each business owner in separate situations, both said the same thing (no joke): “*Why has no one told me this before?*”

Now, think about your customer’s problems that are listed above.

Does your company have solutions to them? You bet! But does your marketing communicate that to your customers? For most companies, the answer is *almost never*.

If your marketing addresses the problems that you solve for dealers (rather than random facts and figures about a particular model of fireplace, fire pit, or BBQ), you’ll find that your brand spreads like wildfire in the marketplace.

3. Your brand leaks—and it must be refilled often.

Andy Stanley is famous for saying, “*Vision doesn’t stick; it doesn’t have natural adhesive. Instead, vision leaks.*” The same is true for your brand.

We’ve seen this over and over again in our industry. Companies come into the market with a disruption that changes the status quo. They enjoy success for a few years, then rest on the laurels of their “brand” while their competition gets better and better—resulting in the loss of their market advantage.

Everyone knows what it's like to spend months making progress with a dealer to win their business, only to have a competitor come in one year later and win half of those showroom displays.

Most often, it's because all of the effort was focused on *winning* the business, not on *keeping* the business.

If you want to keep your customer's business —*and win market share from companies who are too lazy to maintain what they have*— make sure that your brand always stays in front of them.

Keep reminding your customers that you offer products that are easier to sell than anyone else, or that you send your dealers more leads than any other manufacturer in the industry, or that your products

are always delivered consistently. Most companies ignore these simple things, but they matter—*and dealers will remember them if your communication is clear and consistent.*

If you can find ways to consistently remind dealers about the problems that you solve for them (in a way that gives them value), you'll find that they stay loyal to your brand and become walking billboards for it.

The alternative is to stay the same, believe that your brand has more equity than it does, lose relevancy, and watch customers get cherrypicked from right under your nose.

Realizing that your brand leaks is the secret weapon to creating a marketing approach that gets long-term results.



A man in a light blue button-down shirt and dark jeans is sitting on the edge of a blue ping pong table. He is looking towards the left, gesturing with his right hand. In the background, there is a whiteboard with a hand-drawn organizational chart. The chart has two main branches: 'Today Team' and 'Support Staff'. Under 'Today Team' are 'Couch Warehouse' and 'Justin (manager)'. Under 'Support Staff' are 'Stefan (marketing coordinator)', 'Shelly (Accounting/Marketing)', and 'Phones'. There is also a 'Max (utility)' box connected to the 'Justin' branch. The room has a dark ceiling with recessed lights and a wooden floor. The text 'your brand leaks— refill it often' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters.

your brand leaks— refill it often

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Part 3:

3 COSTLY MISTAKES TO AVOID IN YOUR MARKETING

Effective marketing isn't an art project where an audience stands back to marvel at the creativity displayed. Instead, it's a path—a path toward buying something.

Many companies in our industry haven't looked at their marketing this way before. As a result, they continue to fall into three simple pitfalls that derail their message entirely. These mistakes are easy to fall into, but once they have been pointed out, they can be avoided altogether.

Not falling for these traps can transform the effectiveness of your company's marketing and give you the inside track to reaching customers better than anyone else.

Mistake #1: Talking about yourself

Imagine going on a first date with someone who only talks about themselves and never lets you get in a word. They aren't interested in you, your life, or anything—they're only interested in how amazing they are.

Would you go on a second date? Never.

That's what happens with most ads in our industry. They don't show interest in their customers' stories—instead, they tell the world how amazing their advertisers are.

Effective ads talk about the problems that customers face and *only* reference your company as it relates to solving their problems.

For example, many ads will say things like "the highest quality" or "serving our customers for over 30 years," but do these things actually solve a customer's problem? Certainly not the way they're presented here. If a customer doesn't wake up in the night thinking about these things, they shouldn't be mentioned in an ad.

So, what is it that keeps a customer up at night?

Well, for your dealers, there are a number of things:

- Will I get enough traffic in the off-season to retain all of my team?
- Which gas insert line will give me an edge over my competition?
- How do I run a business that doesn't steamroll me day after day?
- How do I get a return with my limited marketing budget?
- Is it worth selling BBQs in the off-season?

At first glance, it might seem like this isn't related to the products that you sell—but that couldn't be further from the truth. If your ads can articulate that you *understand* these problems and *offer real solutions* for them, then dealers will bite.

If your advertising shows customers that you understand them and are actively helping other people like them get what they want, it's going to work.

Customers aren't interested in hearing a company talk about themselves; they want to hear about how a company can solve their problems and help them win. You can do exactly that.

A photograph of two people shaking hands in a cozy indoor setting. The person on the left is wearing a blue sweater and dark pants. The person on the right is wearing a white sweater. In the background, there is a fireplace with a warm fire burning. The text is overlaid in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font.

**it's about
your
customer,
not your
company**

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Mistake #2: Putting too many ideas into your ad

When I was managing retail stores in the Pacific Northwest, sales reps would come in all the time and put a pile of brochures on my desk. They would tell me all about their new line of gas inserts, the outdoor fireplaces that would be available soon, custom chimney caps, their early buy program, and how they offered mantel packages as well.

After the sales rep left, I would generally take the pile of brochures (along with their early buy paperwork), throw it in the garbage, and move on with my day.

This wasn't because their products were bad; it was because there were too many ideas competing for my attention.

When customers have too many ideas competing for their attention, they can't focus, and, as a result, they move on to something else—just like I did.

Your company offers all kinds of products that solve problems for your customers, but every ad (and the overall marketing campaign) *must* have a single controlling idea. This can be difficult—and superiors put all kinds of pressure on you to “maximize” the space of your ad—but the truth is that talking about everything is talking about nothing.

It's simply white noise.

If the controlling idea of your ad is, “Our fireplaces are easier to sell than anyone else's,” then your ad doesn't need to mention BTUs, square footage, CFMs, or EPA 2020 approval. (Hint: it's been 2020 for a whole year—everything has EPA 2020 approval.) Instead, you can talk about things like:

- “This fireplace comes in four sizes, so you know it will fit—no matter what.”
- “Two weeks out on customer estimates? Not for our dealers. Our online quote tool provides customers instant estimates right from your showroom floor.”
- “Tired of trying to convince people to upgrade their fireplace? We send our dealers 20 leads per month of people who want to buy.”
- “Our fireplace builder lets you place a fireplace right in your customer's living room—and it creates a parts list for your sales team.”

All of these fall under the controlling idea of offering fireplaces that are easy to sell. As you present these ads month after month, you'll find that your message sticks like super glue and your customers take action.

Remember, a message about everything is a message about nothing. Avoid this mistake, and you'll look like a marketing guru.

A man with glasses and a grey sweater is speaking to a woman in a white shirt. The scene is set in a room with string lights hanging from the ceiling. The text 'focus on one big idea' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters.

**focus
on one
big
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Mistake #3: Not telling customers what to do next

Few things are more frustrating than punching an address into your GPS, only to find that the directions don't take you where you wanted to go. We've all experienced this: you have an objective in mind, the directions don't take you to the right place, and you're left with no idea how to get to your destination.

The same thing happens with our marketing. If your ads don't tell a customer what to do next, they are missing the mark (and probably winning business for your competition).

After all, if you've convinced a customer that a certain model of fireplace can solve their problem, showed them how amazing their life will be afterward, but not given them the next steps to take, *then you've just done all the work to sell a fireplace for your competitor.*

Every piece of marketing needs to have the next step clearly communicated, or customers will continue to shop.

Imagine that you wake up one day and your toilet is leaking (you know how terrible this is), so you jump online to find someone who

can fix it. As you fly through plumbers' websites, chances are that you're looking for the answer to one question: *"How do I get someone out to my house?"*

If your ads don't tell customers what to do next, they will do nothing.

Now, this isn't aggressive—it's a service.

You offer amazing products and services that can help your customers (dealers and consumers) live better lives. You owe it to them to clearly show them how to make that happen. The worst that they'll say is no—and *that's okay!* "No" just means that your product or service isn't right for them at this time, and you can move on to the customers who need what you offer.

Donald Miller says, *"People don't buy from the companies who offer the best products and services available. People buy from the companies who are easiest to do business with."* If your ads always tell customers what they need to do next, you will be easier to do business with than anyone who assumes that customers know what to do.

If you can create a message that shows a customer that you understand their problem, focuses on one central value that you offer, and tells them exactly what to do next, you'll find that customers do it—again, and again, and again



**tell
them
what
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