



# Marketing Matters

By Richard D. Czerniawski

## BEWARE OF MURPHY'S LAW

My wife has begun preparing for our move from the family home despite it being several months into the future. She came across a stack of Approach magazines, which I diligently read a lifetime ago when I was a young Naval Aviator. Approach, a publication of the Naval Safety Center, focuses on Naval and Marine aviation safety. She wanted to know if I planned to move them.



Back then, I eagerly awaited each issue and devoured them as they arrived. I gleaned the information and statistics that would, hopefully, keep me safe in an inherently perilous environment. I learned from many of the first-hand accounts published in the magazine how Naval and Marine Aviators avoided harrowing situations to escape death, and those analyses by investigators where disaster struck.

I've decided to throw these Approach magazines away. I don't need them any longer, and truth be known, I hadn't even realized I still had them. However, I couldn't depart with the magazines without skimming through at least one when I was reintroduced to Mr. Murphy in a column titled "Murphy's Law."

While it is unclear who coined the term Murphy's Law, the law is plain and simple: ***Anything that can possibly go wrong, does.*** In this particular issue, the column applied the law to aircraft maintenance: *If an aircraft part can be installed incorrectly, someone will install it that way!* By the way, it could ruin your day if you happen to be flying that aircraft.

This got me to thinking of applications of Murphy's law to marketing. Where might we encounter it? Here are some thoughts:

- If something can cause you to miss a new product launch date, it will.
- If a primary endpoint in a clinical study can be missed, it will.
- If product quality issues can arise, they will.
- If taking a social stand in a campaign can backfire, it will.
- If marketing budgets can be slashed, yours will (likely before you spend any of it!).
- If senior management cuts your marketing budget to the bone and yet they demand that your brand achieve the same lofty business objectives (sales, market share and profit targets), it will occur.
- If a competitor can successfully opposition you to gain a competitive advantage, it will.
- If an acquisition can fall through, it will.
- If the FDA can fail to approve your new pharmaceutical, it will (until you develop new, more compelling evidence).
- If a senior manager is going to stuff multiple benefits in a creative brief and demand your messaging communicate them all, s/he will.
- If a message of meaningful product differentiation can be squelched in favor of one that fulfills generic category needs, it will happen.
- If you are told to broaden your target customer base to include all HCPs, all Moms, everyone with a mouth, etc., to achieve your brand's forecast, you will.
- If a tender can go to a lower-priced competitor that claims, "same but cheaper," it will.
- If support for your marketing programs can turn, it will.
- If blame can be assigned to you for failure—given any of the aforementioned (despite being beyond your control or fiated)—it will!

These are just some marketing applications. What others might you identify based upon your experiences or observations of other brands in your company, category, or the world at large?

Now, this isn't pessimism. This law is a reality that we must address, regardless of how infrequently it may occur, if we are going to market successfully. However, while we can't discard Murphy's Law, we can prepare for it. Namely, we can identify and address all the places where something can fail and take extra measures to prevent it. We can prepare to go forward with a fallback plan to address those times when Murphy's Law does strike.

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