



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## **THE DARK SIDE OF MARKETING**

The dark side of marketing is a darkness more than night. It's serving one's insatiable appetite for power and/or riches versus serving and benefiting the people—target customers.

The dark side of marketing is about lying, deceiving, manipulating, personalizing, and not delivering on the promise it could and would not fulfill. It's neither being authentic nor true to your word. It's consciously shrouding a defective product or fabricating a narrative to advance it.

The ends are used to justify self-serving and somewhat questionable means.

Where might we find the dark side of marketing? Political marketing is a shining example of a repugnant philosophy, strategy, and operating practice.

Marketing is the science and art of creating and maintaining customers by satisfying their physical and/or psychological needs and desires in a way that benefits society. It serves multiple constituencies. It recognizes that the enterprise benefits as target customers cast their vote with hard-earned dollars for something they perceive as valuable. Marketing helps create the perception of value—added-value.

However, the current state of political marketing in the United States isn't benefiting society. Many politicians are turning a deaf ear to, ignoring, and, in some cases, even shouting down the voice of the people—their customers.

Politicians choose their words to obfuscate their intentions. They shrewdly use words to make something appear (more) palatable. In their hands, they take the art of deception to new heights with patently false narratives.

If you feel I'm picking on your political party and the vote you cast, you are correct. I can't miss since both parties, and far too many of their candidates, are guilty of lowering marketing to a dark art. The actors on this stage skirt the issues and, instead, opposition their rivals in ways that make them seem unfit not just for the contested position but also for living on planet earth. They take statements of their opponents out of context. They purport to even know the thinking and motivations behind those statements, painting their opponent in negative hues.

Striving to win at a high cost to society, the dark side of marketing hurts the people (customers) they purport to serve. While I'm venting about the blood sport of political marketing, do not think it is the only culprit. It's just so pervasive, infusing itself into daily life—our homes, schools, and places of work.

We can find the dark side of marketing in those tobacco companies that touted the safety of smoking cigarettes, despite having evidence to the contrary. They denied and fought the science while they held it in their knowledge vault.

Consider, too, our opioid crisis. Again, despite knowledge to the contrary, marketers of opioids told physicians that their compounds were not addictive when they clearly are, ruining lives and leaving a blight on our nation.

One does not need to go to extremes to fall into the dark side. It is claiming dubious health benefits of a food item while withholding facts of harmful ingredients. It's airbrushing models to suggest that women can achieve what no cosmetic can do. It's providing special enticements for HCPs (Health Care Practitioners) to prescribe a specific brand of pharmaceutical or surgeons to use a branded device. It is implying or leading the target to infer that which is not true.

Marketing is a powerful force. Proof, well, it can serve to propel Donald Trump to the presidency despite many people believing he is insane. It can also help elect Joe Biden as president despite many people thinking he is cognitively impaired and grossly incompetent. Yes, marketing is that powerful.

It is easy to get caught up in a cause, product, or service where winning becomes the sole objective. But when that objective overcomes ethical practices that serve customers and society, we've ventured into the dark side. Resist.

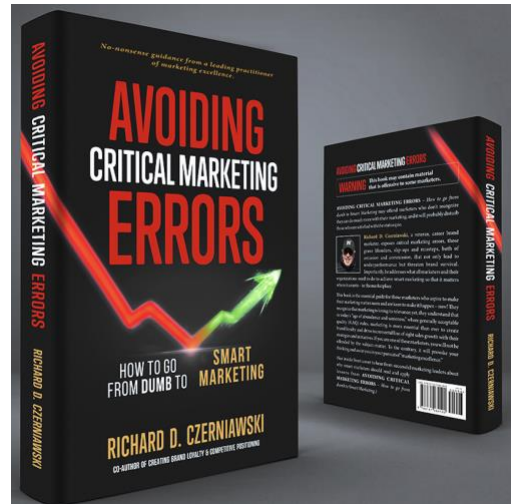
The power of marketing can be used for good or evil. Shine the light on marketing. Let our marketing be a cause for good.

**Proposed Action(s) for Implementation (*Crossing the chasm from learning to impact*):**

1. Know where you stand ethically – Establish your boundaries and stick to them. We shouldn't need the FDA, FTC, or some regulatory or legal body to clarify what's ethical and what is not.
2. Provide incontrovertible proof – Ensure that you can prove your claims in a court of law.
3. Avoid unfair practices – Don't let competitors' unfair practices justify your engaging in them. If you believe that competitors' practices are unjust, unethical, or, worse yet, unlawful, alert your legal counsel.
4. Listen to your customers – They will let you know, assuming you are sensitive to what they are telling you, what they need and want. What's truly important to them?
5. Treat the customer with respect – Don't dare try to fool or bamboozle them. Serve them well! Your brand and organization's reputation is at stake.

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*Are you interested in making your marketing matter even more?* Please read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing.** Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors> It will help you avoid critical marketing errors and, importantly, suggest actions you can take to make your marketing matter even more.



Peace and best wishes,

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