



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## **KARMA CAN BE A BITCH!**

Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, we are in the early stage of what appears to be an economic recession. For some companies and their brands, it may be more like a depression. How long this will last is anyone's guess? Will we have a "V" or "U" shaped recovery given the massive stimulus being pumped into the economies of many nations throughout the world by their governments? It remains to be seen.

While the focus is on the macro level—GDP (Gross Domestic Product – the total monetary value of all products and services produced in a specified period) for each country or region of the world—what is more relevant in a downturn is the performance of our category, company, and brands. The decline in sales will not only be a function of the economy but customer (dis)engagement and our marketing actions—pre, during, and post the recession.

Our marketing will need to be smart(er). Can being smarter make a difference? Most certainly! Let's consider individual investment portfolios—if we are fortunate enough to have one. While the Dow is down some 12% for the year at this writing, personal investment portfolios may vary from deeper declines to gains during this same time frame. As Jim Kwik, executive coach and author of the book *LIMITLESS* states, “Life is the ‘C’ between ‘B’ and ‘D.’” Life comes down to the “choices” we make between “birth” and “death.” The choices we make can bring us rewards or unwanted consequences, which explain the differences in individual investment portfolios and, even, brand, performance.

However, every challenge brings opportunity. What should we be thinking about that can help us make a difference in riding this challenge and turning it into an opportunity? Here are a few:

1. ***Karma can be a bitch*** – Karma: what goes around comes around. Accordingly, we need to examine the customer experience we have delivered, are delivering, and need to deliver. It is about more than meeting foundational customer needs. All the products and brands in our categories can achieve this minimum requirement—and many will do so at discount pricing. Ouch! As Apple Corporation strives to develop products that deliver a defined “feeling,” we should likewise get beyond the product we sell and think about the experience we deliver. Here's where “the whole product”—comprised of both tangibles and intangibles (e.g., servicing, warranty, terms, customer-training, etc.)—can play a major role in assuring customers they are making the right choice in choosing our brand, even versus discounted products. As been often stated, the goal should be to “delight” customers.

There's another aspect to karma that should warrant our consideration. Namely, as our late poet laureate, Maya Angelou said, *"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."* Yes, karma can be a bitch if you haven't treated or aren't treating customers well. This leads me to the golden rule, "treat others (i.e., your customers, your team members, etc.) the way you would like them to treat you." The golden rule is also referred to as "the ethic of reciprocity." In other words, if you want customers to choose you, go out of your way to treat them well, very well, and they will reciprocate.

2. ***Ignorance is no excuse for the law, nor for dumb marketing*** – *Ignorantia juris non excusat* is Latin for "ignorance of the law excuses not." Since it is 57-years since I read Cicero in Latin class, let's put it in plain English: regardless of whether one is aware of the law or not, we are liable if we violate it. Exceed the legal speed limit, and you are liable for a traffic ticket (i.e., a fine!) even if you didn't know the posted speed limit. What does this mean for us, marketers, during an economic downturn? Proven principles—fundamental truths—are our laws. Ignorance of them is not smart. It's dumb! Ignorance does not excuse dumb marketing. Accordingly, we need to know and apply proven principles in our marketing to make it matter more. Regardless of our knowledge of proven marketing principles, we are liable for our company's and brand's performance.

The preceding leads me to another thought. We, marketers, need to know the causal relationship between the strategies and initiatives we choose to line-of-sight impact on sales and market share performance. If we don't know this, we are ignorant and doing dumb marketing. We cannot afford to do dumb marketing—particularly during a downturn in the economy. It will bleed precious resources and pile up not only opportunity losses but realized losses to the bottom (profit) line. Know and obey proven marketing principles. (One may violate a principle; HOWEVER, you must know the principle you are breaking and have a rationale for violating it. These are few and far between and are the province of master marketers.)

3. ***A marketer gets what a marketer deserves*** – This statement is a derivation of "a client gets what a client deserves," which may be heard among agency personnel referring to their clients. It captures and adds to the previous two statements about karma and proven marketing principles. Yes, we need to provide the customer with the kind of experience we would desire and, yes, we need to know and apply proven marketing principles. Additionally, we should employ best practices and quality processes in our work. If we don't, we will fail to leverage our brand assets, team talents, and the resources of the organization.

There's another statement made by agency personnel pertaining to us, marketers. "A client gets what a client demands." As the late, great advertiser, Leo Burnett, founder of the agency that bears his name, stated, *"When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get them, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either."* Don't settle for what is, reach for what could be. We don't have to accept that a sales decline, or one of X%, is a fait accompli. We have the power to achieve better if we demand more from our marketing. It starts with demanding more of ourselves.

Yes, karma can be a bitch, but it can also be a blessing, regardless of the economic situation. We either do better or worse than the average. To do "better," we should strive to treat customers to a

delightful experience. Additionally, we must apply proven principles in driving strategies and actions that generate incremental line-of-sight sales and market share. Moreover, demand more of our teams and ourselves to make our marketing matter more during economic downturns—and any situation.

*Take your marketing to the next level.* Check-out my new book, AVOID CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing. It can help you achieve success during and post the COVID-19 recession. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay safe and be well.

Peace and best wishes,

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