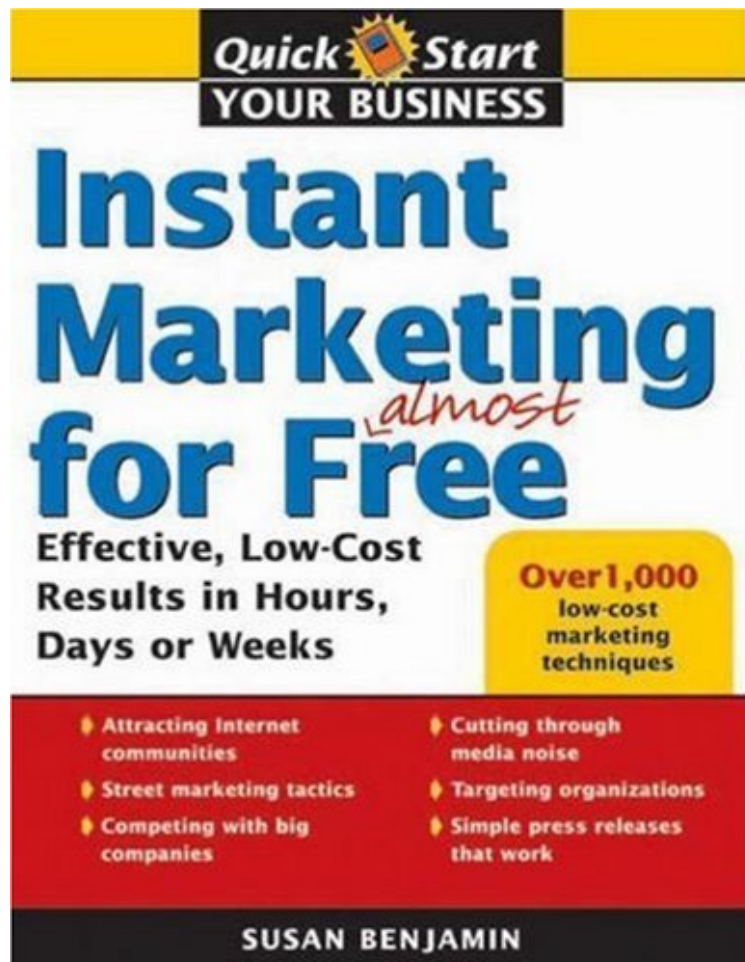


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Instant Marketing for Almost Free: Effective, Low-Cost Results in Weeks, Days, or Hours (Quick Start Your Business)

Susan Benjamin

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Susan Benjamin : Instant Marketing for Almost Free: Effective, Low-Cost Results in Weeks, Days, or Hours (Quick Start Your Business) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Instant Marketing for Almost Free: Effective, Low-Cost Results in Weeks, Days, or Hours (Quick Start Your Business):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A book that you can read in 30 minutes or less that will give you an overview of things you can do to help market your small biz By Jeff Lippincott This book was just OK. Nothing special. I looked at the author's bio at the end of the book and it appears she's a public speaker and professional writer. It did not look like she has the experience to be an authority on the subject of this book. And, quite frankly, when I read the book it appears to be little more than a term paper rather than a quality book on marketing in 2008 for the small business owner. The book is split into five sections and 18 chapters as follows: I. Getting started (12) II.

Marketing imperatives (3-5) III. The Instant Marketing Supply Kit (6-14) IV. People, Places, Things (15-18) V. Appendix (AB)

1. Taking the mystery out of marketing
2. Marketing from within: The heart of your marketing campaign
3. Love you, love your brand
4. Ten imperatives of instant marketing success
5. Get the right response
6. Signature materials
7. Brochures
8. Almost everything you need to know about creating your Web site
9. Direct mail and email marketing
10. Short stash: Tip sheets and flyers
11. Newsletters
12. News releases and other forms of publicity
13. Advertising: From newspapers to the airwaves and TV
14. Giveaways
15. Telephone marketing
16. The "Who" of instant marketing
17. Roadside marketing: Lobbies, windows, and signs
18. The people in the places: Marketing face-to-face

A. Worksheets
B. Samples

Why was Chapter 7 included? Today a Web site is imperative, and whatever goes in a brochure should already be listed in the Web site. Chapter 8 on Web sites was weak. Why wasn't Chapter 9 more about emails rather than direct mail. Direct mail is a dying way to promote a business (although it still has its place in nonprofit promotion). And I think the spam issue could have been better covered in the chapter. Chapter 10 and flyers? Oh my gosh! Flyers are such a waste of time and use of resources. Chapter 11 discusses newsletters. Why didn't it cover ezines? Newsletters are pretty much ancient history now that we are in the Internet Age and Web 2.0 is in force. And Chapter 13 seemed a little inappropriate since the title of the book implies the book is about cheap ways to market and advertise. Radio and TV are not exactly bootstrappin. Chapter 15 on telesales? With the Don't Call lists out there, this is not the way to go today. I'm surprised this was included. The chapters are short. And there is lots of white space on the pages. Don't expect too much coverage on any of the topics discussed. But if you are just looking for a book that you can read in 30 minutes or less and will give an overview of some things you can do to help market your small business, then take a look at this book. 3 stars!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not even close to free

By KenI bought the book because it sounded like it had some good ideas for the business I just bought. The reality a far different. If you are very creative and own a printing company some of her ideas could be almost free. The problem is most of the world isn't creative enough to draw the logos or write the press releases she suggest. The book is also geared more to those in retail and law firms. Not too many contractors or day cares will have a need for a press release. My biggest disappointment came in her political view point being peppered throughout the book. If I wanted to read about politics I would have gotten a book about that. Here I wanted to learn about marketing and branding, not how some forms of marketing show you are hot headed but if you go a different route it shows you are intelligent. I am keeping my politics out of my review so I won't be able to give specific examples, but they can't be missed. All told I took maybe one or two nuggets from the book that I will ever be able to use. I can't in good conscious recommend this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An Easy to read Guide for the Layman

By Valerie B. Lull Susan F. Benjamin writes an interesting book on effective, low-cost method of advertising, suggesting that you get results in weeks, days or hours. I think hours is stretching it a bit. The book has an attractive format and is easy to read and understand for the lay peson and people just learning about marketing. It was not full of jargon and most of the techniques offered were relatively simple. The book has a workbook feel to it with worksheets in the back that the reader can fill out to enhance their understanding of what is being presented. In some ways this book seems like a textbook for someone studying in a marketing class. The most useful section to me was the section on making tip sheets and flyers for your product. These can be given out as freebies and let your customer know what you are offering. All in all it was a good book, easy reading and full of good information for the person who is new to marketing. -- Valerie Lull, Author, Ten Healthy Teas

Without a doubt, developing high-impact marketing is one of the toughest challenges for small and medium businesses. The world of marketing is in the midst of a revolution, generating great new opportunities for entrepreneurs in Internet, street and stealth marketing. Instant Marketing for Almost Free presents tactics designed to deliver effective marketing quickly and at a low cost:--Reaching out to Internet "communities"--"Street" and other nontraditional advertisements--Email marketing that's not spam--And hundreds of other methods Instant Marketing for Almost Free is a totally up-to-the-minute approach to marketing that will see businesses increasing their profits while reducing their marketing headaches.

From the Back Cover Promote your business effectively for next to nothing! Your company might offer the most satisfying goods and services on the planet, but that won't equal profit if potential customers don't know you exist. Learn how to get the word out about your business in the most inexpensive and effective ways possible. Developing compelling marketing plans and materials requires skill, knowledge and strategy. Let Instant Marketing for Almost Free teach you: --How to identify the core words, strategies and images that define your company--Tips and techniques for establishing your brand--The ten most critical imperatives of marketing material--Everything you need to know about creating your website--The secrets of composing persuasive brochures, flyers and news releases--How, when and where to advertise--Ways of establishing yourself as an expert in your field--How to make your office and sign say exactly what you want them to ? Susan F. Benjamin's advice is fun, outrageous and at times, surprising. Every employee should read this book-and their bosses should read it too.? -Harold Rauner, President, The Business Bank Susan Benjamin has been helping small businesses and other organizations better market their products and services

since 1989. She has established, trained and researched marketing strategies for organizations including Putnam Investments and MFS, and has trained thousands of marketing writers. About the Author Susan F. Benjamin has brought communications issues to the nation for almost twenty years. Publications from the Wall Street Journal to the Chicago Tribune have featured Susan's novel approaches, while her opinion pieces on language-related issues have appeared in USA Today, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the New York Daily News, Government Executive, and countless others. Her other books include Quick and Painless Business Writing (Career Press, December 2006) and Words at Work: Business Writing in Half the Time with Twice the Power (Perseus, 1997). As a speaker, Susan has appeared on CNN and National Public Radio and other broadcasts. She has trained over one hundred thousand federal and private-sector employees in numerous venues and has given keynote and other addresses. Her clients have included the Carnegie Mellon Executive Program, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Liberty Mutual Insurance Group, Fleishman Hillard International Communications, and many others. A former professor, Susan mentored academics at Harvard University and MIT. She participated in the White House initiative on plain language under the Clinton administration, overseeing the revision of countless documents affecting millions of citizens each year. Her clients included the State Department, Department of Defense, Food and Drug Administration, as well as hundreds of private-sector organizations. Susan's research includes assessments of organizational communication processes and studies on how language affects reader responsiveness. Articles about these findings have appeared in numerous publications, including Scribes Legal Journal, Government Executive, and Employment Management Today. Susan studied philosophy and writing at Boston University and Bennington College. She received her master's in writing from Lesley College, where she worked with C. Michael Curtis, senior editor of the Atlantic. Visit Susan's website at instantmarketingforalmostfree.com. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Ten Imperatives of Instant Marketing Success Excerpted from Instant Marketing for Almost Free by Susan Benjamin copy; 2007

If you're going to have a marketing campaign, you must have marketing materials. Everyone knows this, but judging by the quality of marketing material out there, you'd think no one was paying attention. I mean, some of the stuff—actually most of it—is bad. This, by the way, is great news for you. Your marketing material can be worlds better than your competitors' and bring you the response you want. But to reap those rewards, you had better do ten critical things. We'll return to them throughout the rest of this book—and you should be sure to return to them for the rest of your marketing life.

Imperative 1: It Should Be Useful! Think of all the business cards you've received in your life. How many are there? Hundreds? Thousands? Now, think of all the cards you have scanned in your computer. Filed in your Rolodex. Kept anywhere in your office. How many is that? Twenty? Thirty? Less? And the brochures? How many of those have you saved for more than an afternoon? The answer speaks to the number-one challenge business owners face when producing marketing material: how do you get the customer to pay attention to it? And the answer, oft forgotten by business owners everywhere, is give it a purely utilitarian function. Dentists and hairdressers learned this lesson long ago for more immediate and practical reasons: they put the time and date of the appointment on the back of their business card. The customer remembers the appointment and keeps the card, so the next time that tooth aches or the hair grows too low on the brow, they know exactly whom to call. Giving your marketing material a utilitarian function also insures that your customer will return to your marketing material again and again. Take the Web. Here you have ample opportunities to offer your customer useful, even indispensable, information. You can provide tips or a spoken lesson every week or two that your customer will eagerly access. Only remember: update the site regularly. Freshness is the key to having frequent visitors! If you happen to be in retail or manufacturing, where lessons of this sort may be impractical, think about the other marketing materials you dispense. Have a brochure? Your hours of operation are helpful, but how about putting safety tips on the back—perfect for the workplace bulletin board. If you're in the security business, how about a list of emergency numbers on the back of your brochure, business cards, or anywhere they'll fit. This will enhance your visibility, ensure the customer equates your brand with safety, and come in handy in an emergency. Naturally, you can boost your exposure with giveaways, too. And I am not talking about Tootsie Roll pops or oversized erasers that might get a laugh but end up in the trash. Pens and pencils are okay, but face the small-object reality—the print is usually too tiny for anyone to see, affordable varieties tend to be cheap and the customers unlikely to value them, and they're just the right size to slip behind a couch pillow or roll on the floor, never to be seen again. Instead, try for something really useful. Calendars are an all-time favorite, and as we'll discuss in greater detail, with computer programs you can do-it-yourself, no problem. I have a calendar from the West Virginia Extension Service posted right by my garden door, alerting customers like me not only of national holidays, but also the correct time to plant my garden, purchase lime, and countless other details most of us don't know or remember. Unusual giveaways with your name and number on them can prove even more beneficial than the standard ones, just as long as there's a direct connection to your business. For example, the art supply and framing store down the street gives away yardsticks. I've had mine for years. And the insurance agent I mentioned earlier gives away great road maps. True, he's an agent and probably couldn't afford the upscale merchandise if his parent company didn't send it. But there's plenty out there that you can afford and that your customer will appreciate.

Imperative 2: Use Marketing Smarts! Business owners often produce marketing material simply because everyone else does. Resist this impulse! Be smart about what you produce and how much time you devote to developing new material. Here are some pointers that will help: bull;

Create an image and style of word use that you can easily duplicate from one marketing piece to another. Have a great logo and put it everywhere—your brochure, your website, and anywhere else it needs to go. Make sure you can easily duplicate the style of your business cards on your stationery and website.

bull; Consider what marketing pieces you really need. Let's assume you're on a limited budget. You need to consider the functional aspect of your marketing materials. If you're an organizational consultant or researcher, you may produce a newsletter highlighting your recent projects or findings. And naturally, you'll post it on the Web. But do you really need to send emails to your busy customers saying it's out there? It may only clutter their website and annoy them.

bull; Think volume. One key marketing strategy is determining how you can reach as many of your primary customers as possible. So, you want marketing material that's sure to reach them—and nothing else. Lots of consulting firms, for example, spend boatloads of employee time (and therefore money) writing white papers. These ads/articles/exposés may make the author feel important and knowledgeable, but reality check: who reads them? Better to develop a breathtaking presentation for a conference or a short article, or even better, a tip sheet your customer can really use.

Imperative 3: Focus On the Customer; Not You, Your Business, Your Employees, or Anything Else

Your customer doesn't care about you. Or your employees. Or your business philosophy. Not even how many years you've been around. What they do care about is how all these matters affect them—what we call the customer-focus.

Say you're writing a brochure for Business Supply Services, an office supply store that is trying to compete with the Big Guys. What they lack in pricing (they're more expensive), they make up for in customer service. Now, they're rolling out a new concept: they've partnered with a leading insurance company to offer business coverage with representatives right in the store. Their target: small-business owners who may not be insured.

Note how the first sample focuses on Business Supply Services and the other focuses on the customer.

BSS: Business Supply Services now offers affordable insurance coverage for small businesses.

Customer: Now, you can get affordable insurance for your small business without adding an extra trip to your schedule.

Here's another example:

BSS: Our customer service is unmatched in the industry. Our staff knows office products and is available to answer questions.

Customer: You will receive unmatched customer service from staff who know office products and will readily answer your questions.

The best connection in this regard is a direct connection: the written equivalent of a handshake, a good laugh, drinking a frothy beer together at a pub. Well, maybe not quite that direct. Here are a few more pointers:

bull; Use language that makes the customer feel comfortable. You don't want to talk at them, but to them. Even if you're writing to a fellow industry professional, lean toward the calm, friendly language you'd use at a dinner party and not a boardroom presentation. So in a line like this: "Our research will assist you in the determination of what results transpire in actual events that occur when following normal procedural actions . . ." you're no longer one person addressing another, but a company talking to the air. Instead, try saying: "With the information in our research, you'll be able to predict the results you'll get when following normal procedures."

bull; Discard anything that does not directly benefit the customer. An accounting firm I know produced a brochure that best illustrates this classic mistake. The cover showed a picture of the CPA and his staff, in what looked like a holiday greeting snapshot. All nice, friendly people, but I need to see them because . . . ? Then, the copy gave a chronology of the firm, starting back when most customers were probably toddlers. "Back then, we were called Data Processing Professionals . . ." the brochure read. No one—and I repeat no one—cares, which doesn't matter, since the customer probably didn't make it past the photo anyway.

bull; Use the second person "you." This is possible 100 percent of the time in your marketing materials. That doesn't mean you must use the second person in every sentence, but readers should know you're speaking directly to them. For example, I just picked up a great brochure for a yoga retreat in Mexico. The opening line: "Float through winter on the turquoise waters of the Mexican Caribbean." No question, the customers know the message is directed at them.

The Exceptions

Avoid the second person if you're going to insult your reader by doing so.

Let's return to Business Supply Services one last time. Say the company is writing a flyer about a recent survey revealing that small-business owners have big misconceptions about office insurance. The point of the flyer: address their misconceptions, position the company as small-business experts, and encourage customers to sign up for insurance at one of its locations. Of course, you can't say, "You have misconceptions . . ." because they may be insulted. This, in turn, breaks an unspoken cardinal marketing rule: don't insult your customer. Instead, focus on those other poor dolts, the ones from the survey. That way, you address your customers' misconceptions without insulting them, dispel their myths, and get them to buy the insurance. The typical approach goes like this: "A recent survey reveals that over 65 percent of small-business owners have serious misconceptions about insurance coverage for their office." Instead, try this: "Are you aware of the benefits of insuring your business? Amazingly, over 65 percent of small-business owners have serious misconceptions about what insurance coverage really means. Here's what you need to know . . ."

Imperative 4: Accentuate the Customer Benefits

In Imperative 3, I said your marketing effort must focus on the customers. Let's add a caveat to that idea: it must focus on how they'll benefit from your offering. Think about the old customer service concept. Sure, the customer service reps will help you every time you walk into the store. But so what? I mean, the idea is great, but how will it make the customer's life easier or more productive? The answer would read this way: "You can get informed advice from our staff to help you purchase the best products at the lowest possible price." Perhaps the most glaring glitch in the benefits approach comes from the "We love you, we care about you; that's why we're selling you our product/service/everything else." Face it, most businesses have a hard time

pulling off a lovey-dovey approach because it crosses the work/personal relationship line. The customer knows this and knows your real motivation is not to express love for them, but to make a profit. So the message sounds phony. Take this familiar-sounding line: "Business Supply Services cares about you and your business. That's why we want you to know the truth about insurance coverage." Better to focus on the customer: "Your business may be vulnerable in ways you may not expect. That's why you should know the truth about insurance coverage." Of course, you can always state the benefit directly: "Make sure your business is fortified from potential losses by learning . . ." For example, I have an architect friend whose specialty is designing or rehabilitating schools. He's much better off showing images of the schools he's created, especially with happy schoolchildren going in and out the doors, than the standard snapshot of people sitting around a table discussing plans.

Imperative 5: Use a Catch-and-Keep Approach A recent study led by Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, revealed a startling fact: the average person takes fifty milliseconds—that's less time than it takes you to blink your eye—to form an opinion about a website. That's an impression that sticks. The study said there's a "halo effect" where a visitor's opinion of the rest of the site—and your offering—is formed by that first impression. All this proves what marketing professionals have known a for long time: you must get the customer's attention, instantly and completely, or they're gone. With visuals, this means finding the perfect design, photo, or cartoon that fuels an instant feeling, from humor to concern. With words, this means getting them to focus on one or two key words, but no more. Once you get going, always start every new segment of your text with quick, interesting, funny, alarming, or otherwise blood-quickenning words. That means the headline on your brochure, the first words of your direct mail piece, the subject line of your email, and the homepage of your website must be sharp. Then, don't let your lively style drop! Follow through on the remaining segments.

Imperative 6: Keep the Word Use Clear and Clean It may seem silly even to mention that your marketing material should be well-written. Naturally, you think. Why state the obvious? But remarkably, most marketing material is pretty bad. I'm not just referring to copy that small businesses with small budgets create, I mean everyone! The language wanders, the grammar does its own thing, so to speak, and the message is basically a wash. By cleaning up the style, you'll have noticeably better material, particularly if you plan to distribute it at conferences or place it in racks where people will compare. But a word of caution: if you write the copy yourself, have someone check it. Make sure that someone is a good writer, too, with an eye for problems. If you hire copywriters, check their writing closely. Remember what I said a moment ago: most marketing material is pretty poorly written and there's no reason why this marketing expert should produce anything different. Here are the items you should check for:

Correct Grammar Sometimes the best copy has errors that even schoolchildren know to avoid. A common one is noun-verb agreement: "The best way for children to get what they need are to ask for it." It should read: "The best way for children to get what they need is to ask for it." Of course, potential grammar problems are limitless, so as I said, check carefully.

Passive Voice The passive voice is a typical problem in marketing material. Some authors think it sounds more professional and convincing. Others just plunk it in without even realizing it. Regardless, the passive voice creates an artificial sound that's deadly to your marketing voice and can even interfere with the meaning you're trying to convey. Here are four instances of the passive voice. Avoid them all.

bull; Don't separate the subject and the verb. You learned about this in high school: "You will be immediately helped by one of our customer services reps." Notice that the subject, "customer service rep," occupies the back end of the sentence, after the verb. Instead, say: "One of our customer sales reps will immediately help you." The difference may seem slight in one sentence, but when repeated over and over, this mistake adds lots of extra words, convoluting sentence structure and making for a boring tone.

bull; Don't leave out the subject. This problem will leave you out of the picture altogether, when you should be starring in it. You know this problem well, I'm sure, from sentences that read: "All phone calls will be answered within twenty-four hours" or "Any problems and the cost of your entire system will be refunded." Who's answering these calls? And who's refunding the money? The sentence doesn't tell you. So here are the rewrites: "Our specialists will answer your phone calls within twenty-four hours" and "We will refund the cost of your entire system if you have problems."

bull; Don't disguise your verbs. Stay away from sentences with verbs posing as nouns, like this one: "The development phase typically takes only two weeks." Instead, get that action in there, and write: "Typically we only need two weeks to develop the infrastructure."

bull; Don't use empty actors. Okay, I admit that this one isn't so bad, but it's not so great, either. That's where you say: "There are six steps that you can take. It is important that you take all of them." The "there are" and "it is" contain verbs but "there" and "it" really aren't the actors. Here's the rewrite: "Be sure to take all six steps."

Cohesion This is the order of your information. Make sure you don't just plunk your points on the page; see that one flows logically to the next. Even in brochures or those short direct mail pieces where the individual paragraphs may seem only loosely related, have a master plan that holds everything together. Try using numbers. For example: "Seven Reasons Why Mason's Motor Oil is Right for Your Car," or take a direction, such as smallest item to largest.

Tone Make sure all your marketing material is 100 percent—yes, that's right, 100 percent—jargon-free. I don't care if you are an engineer, software developer, or health plan expert. Jargon shrivels up the tone of any marketing piece, no matter how jazzy the graphics. And keep it friendly, accessible, and generally upbeat.

Conciseness It's true, less is more. But concise is slightly different. Supply your customer with all the points they must know, but only use necessary words. Here's what you do: write the marketing piece, or review the finished product if someone wrote it for you. Then, get out your red pen (or use your track changes program) and cross

out any filler. Be especially aware of phrases like "In the event that" and "Due to the fact that," and substitute one word such as "if" and "because." When you're finished, smooth out the sentence structure-with all those missing words, you're bound to find some holes.

Imperative 7: Use White Space WiselyWhite space does more than provide a break to the customer's eye. It's essential. Here are just a few benefits:

- Creates a friendly feel. Customers frequently misinterpret that wall of ink in long paragraphs for an unfriendly, aloof, or otherwise hostile sentiment, no matter what the word use.
- Looks like less. Say you have fifteen lines in a paragraph. The customer immediately perceives this as something as long as an excerpt from War and Peace. But divide it into three bite-sized paragraphs of five, and it's almost edible.
- Gives the customer's eye room to wander. In the process, he might jump from paragraph to paragraph, especially if you have bullets, callouts, and sidebars. Wandering, by the way, is a good thing. In most cases, the only other option is to quit reading.

Perhaps the best reason to use white space, though, is that every web page, presentation, and coupon requires it. Once you do add information, remember that customers want easy-to-read, easy-to-see nuggets of information. But beware of some typical hazards.

For example, brochures, presentations (PowerPoint and others), and other longer text documents frequently suffer from bullet mania. That's where you see page after page of bullets, making the piece look like a connect-the-dots game without the numbers. The overuse of bullets creates the very monotony they were intended to break.

Another malady typical of web marketing messages: pages that provide interesting visuals but little text and even less useful text. The visitor has to click through the site, searching for basic information. The site is breaking a cardinal rule: never make the reader work for information. Instead, place critical points where the customer can instantly see them. A key point in the far left corner? Don't think so, unless you don't have any other text on the page, and not a whole lot of image. Key point positioned near center screen? Better. Much better.

Another space problem evolved about ten or fifteen years ago. You see it in brochures, newsletters, and websites. You can tell the designer was going for a high-energy feel, but instead created busy, chaotic images so intense the visitor's eye has nowhere to focus. Every page of every piece is loaded with so many images the customer feels dizzy just looking at them. As for the written message? It's buried in an avalanche of shapes and color and the customer never actually sees it. Make sure your designers understand that it's the message of the site-not the visual impact-that's important.

Imperative 8: Apply Font SavvySo many fonts, so little time to use them. They support the mood you want to express, injecting importance, emphasis, and visibility to your points. Of course, you could say: importance, emphasis, and visibility but no matter.

Besides, fonts add variety, which is always a good thing. In the old days, for example, you used quotation marks for things people said. Now, you can replace quotation marks with italics in some cases and keep them in others, such as a callout in your newsletter or brochure. Even better, fonts create personality, independent of words, content, and sentence structure. Vive la difference:

COME TO OUR BIG SALE!! DON'T MISS OUT!!And **COME TO OUR BIG SALE . . .** Don't miss out!

Naturally, those font additives bring visual dimension to your message-great for the ever-longing-for-entertainment reader. So, with all these pluses, could font possibly have a downside? Uh-huh. That's when the bolds, italics, large letters, and other font variations appear cheap or gratuitous, much like blue nail polish at an upscale dinner party. Besides, you risk alienating the customer who gets distracted into oblivion. Equally bad, the font can distract you-the writer-from using powerful and nicely controlled words, instead letting you rely on this cheap substitute for meaning.

Imperative 9: Consider the "Love at Fifth Sight" PrincipleLove at fifth sight should be the mantra of anyone producing marketing material. The customer, especially the prospective customer, probably won't remember you the first time they see your brochure or ad, or even the second time. Maybe the third time, perhaps the fourth, but the fifth . . . now they've got to remember! How you reach them, as we'll discuss soon, depends on your customer, your location, and obviously, your offering. But one thing's for sure: you need a mixture of approaches to make your marketing effort work. That means you must support every marketing piece you send with several others. For example, say you're running an ad in your local paper. You can't run an ad and expect results. You can't run thirty ads and expect results, either. But thirty ads, direct mail material, banners in front of your site, and phone calls to key primary customers, and you're all set.

Imperative 10: Avoid Anything Boring, Especially ClicheMost marketing material suffers from one resounding malady: it's boring. Really boring. And in this day of speed, dazzle, and information overload, that's a fierce problem. With word use, whether in ads, TV spots, or newsletters, your greatest enemies are cliché. And trust me, everyone uses them in marketing material, although common sense and good taste indicate you should do otherwise. Before you read further, take this vow: never, ever use cliché in any marketing material or presentation, by phone or Web, live or recorded.

Here are a few clichés to watch for. They float to the page, so meaningless they're anemic. And vacuous? They're the dumb blondes of marketing material. Here goes:

LeaderTrust me, every large company and plenty of small ones claim they're a leader in something. We have so many leaders in the world, it's amazing we have any followers. You've seen the claims. They litter just about every brochure, business card, ad, and website, saying something like this: **See why we're a leading auto repair specialist . . .** A recognized leader in home care . . . Today, our combination of high-quality products and superior customer service makes us a leader in the industry. Assume for a minute the leader line has a fragment of value. These questions still linger: What is it leading? Why should the prospective customer care if the company is a leader? What does "leadership" have to do with the product or service it offers?

NeedsThis word is so common and totally ambiguous; it doesn't matter what industry or region, or even what's for sale. See if you can spot

the industries in the following samples: Someone can assist you in making decisions for your changing needs. Meeting all your Italian American needs. Help us meet your specific needs. Don't know? Let me tell you: 1. Insurance company. In fact, just about every insurance company has a similar line taking unfortunate prominence on their website. This is especially toxic for an industry struggling to break through the boring and insipid image most people ascribe to it and became somehow human, jovial, and real. 2. The little Italian grocery store in Gloucester, Massachusetts, which really couldn't meet all of anyone's Italian American needs. Their supplies were so low you couldn't even make a snack from them. 3. This is a health insurance company. A big one with plenty of money to invest in a great website. Unfortunately, this takes center spot on the home page. Another problem with "needs" is that it sounds disingenuous—far removed from the customers' thinking. Look, whoever says, "Hmm, I guess my insurance needs have changed. . . ." And when do you ever say to your spouse, "Honey, you need to consider your vacation needs"? You get the idea.

Commitment Most marketing writers feel obliged, for reasons I have never understood, to use the "C" word. You know, commitment. It's meaningless and far more interesting when concerning marriage ceremonies or mental institutions than business transactions. Besides, who cares about a commitment? It's symbolic and promissory; customers want the real thing. So, commit yourself to avoiding the "C" word; then, don't use it.

24/7 We know you're somehow available 24/7. That's the point of the Web. Otherwise, we'd only have offices that close at 5 p.m. and answering services so you can get back to customers later. The only thing worse than "24/7" when you're talking time is something like this: Ready to help you, 24/7. You can access information anytime, day or night, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, even Christmas . . . All right already! Of course, if you have live, walking and breathing customer service reps in the office day and night, that's a different story. How many places, aside from your local hospital or convenience store, can claim that? If you must indulge in the 24/7 routine, go ahead, but please, find new ways to say it.

Tailored These days, everyone promises services that are "tailored" to meet your needs, requirements, and so on. The "tailored" word would be great, too, if everyone else didn't make that promise. But in most cases, that's the very purpose of say, dress sizes, proposals, a pre-program analysis, and marketing research. In fact, you'd be hard-pressed to find anything that isn't tailored! Otherwise, you might end up selling bathing suits to Eskimos. Find a better, more specific way to highlight your customer service.

Only a Click Away Aside from being a cliché, it's not true. You don't click once; you probably click five or six times, at least, and have to enter all sorts of passwords and credit card numbers. So forget it.

From the Comfort of Your Home Cliché;? Yes, cliché;. Besides, who says their homes are comfortable? If they have three or four kids, their homes definitely aren't comfortable. More likely, they're chaotic. Maybe they're just too hassled to leave.

Record What You've Learned You'll find all the items here in the following checklist. Use it for every marketing piece your business produces!