

A templative tale from
Mischief Marketing

Mischievous Warhol

[excerpted from Chapter 12 (print edition) ...]

... For a long list of people (and corporations) who've mischief marketed themselves using new names, visit MischiefMarketing.com.

The Anti-Oz Tactic

Sometimes it makes sense to do the *opposite* of the Wizard of Oz tactic. In such a case, you make yourself look smaller and more helpless than you really are.

Poor Boy Andy

You could write a whole book about the many ways in which Andy Warhol mischievously exposed the art industry as the commercial enterprise it had always been, and still is today. You could write another whole book about his extraordinary transformation of that message. And another about how he used mystery and ambiguity to cloak his mission.

Here is a short but telling example of how the young Warhol customized his image (mischievously) to fit whatever picture of him his prospects expected to see.

[Eventually, Andy Warhol] was making enough money ... to afford a Brooks Brothers suit and trenchcoat, which he wore to go out in the evenings, while assiduously maintaining his poor-boy image for art directors.

— Bockris, Victor.
The Life and Death of Andy Warhol.
New York: Bantam Books, 1989.

The next story is more about survival than marketing, but it once again illustrates how to use the Anti-Oz tactic:

A Canny Hitchhiker

The following story about Hunter Thompson (author of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*) shows how effective it can be to reverse the Wizard of Oz effect, and make yourself look smaller or more helpless than you really are:

Their first rule of the road was to pick up every hitchhiker. In western Kansas, Semonin stopped for a man carrying a five-gallon gas can. When the hitchhiker got into the backseat, he flipped the latches on the can to reveal that it was stuffed with clothes. "No one will pick up you if they think you're a hitchhiker," he explained. "You have to be a motorist in distress."

— Perry, Paul.
Fear and Loathing: The Strange and Terrible Saga of Hunter S. Thompson.
New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992.

You don't have to look far to find more examples of the Anti-Oz tactic. Marilyn Monroe used it to convey an impression of vulnerability and innocence. Avis used it when they implemented their famous "We Try Harder" campaign. Amazon.com used it to look like an underdog when Barnes & Noble got onto the Internet. Netscape used it when they approached Janet Reno. (If Microsoft could figure out a way to use Anti-Oz, it would help them enormously.) Walter Taylor used it. So did AT&T.

10-10-MISCHIEF Saves You Big Money on Your Long-Distance Phone Bills!

Did you know that behind many of those supposedly smaller and cheaper "10-10" long-distance phone companies there lies ... the giant AT&T?

Here's an AT&T executive explaining the rationale behind having a huge company pose as a small one (reversing the usual direction of the Wizard of Oz tactic). Note his comment about humor. Via this tactic, a serious brand can act like a sillier, more mischievous one.

Howard McNally, president of AT&T Transition Services, which oversees AT&T's dial-around business, says AT&T decided to offer the service under a different name when it entered the market last year because "some people don't want to buy a brand, they think [10-10] is a better bargain." In addition, he adds, "It allows us to be different ... a little cute, very humorous, which isn't in AT&T's brand image."

— Kathy Chen. "Some Consumers Attack Long-Distance Ad Claims."
Wall Street Journal. 11/4/1999.

Artisan Entertainment — which very successfully mischief marketed *The Blair Witch Project* — often uses both tactics at once. To independent filmmakers, Artisan represents itself as a smaller, more intimate company than it really is. But to giant video chains like Blockbuster, it boasts of being a major player in the market.

~ Idea Joggers ~

- Ø What can you do that will make your business look smaller, more vulnerable?
- Ø Can you rent a cheap-looking conference room — for a day?
- Ø Can you get some big company to attack your business unfairly, then go to the press and scream, “We’ve been attacked unfairly!”
- Ø That last one seems sleezy, doesn’t it?
- Ø How can you parlay being the underdog into creating the impression that you’re therefore more motivated and caring than the big dogs?

Mischief Marketing Tactic: Playing Up Your Faults

Got a glaring flaw? Don’t hide it. Play it up!

Mischief Marketing in Film — *Roxanne*

In the 1987 film *Roxanne* — based loosely on Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play that has captured the imagination of readers for over 100 years, and inspired a raft of adaptations — Steve Martin plays C.D. Bates, a man with a big nose, and an even bigger crush on a beautiful blond (Daryl Hannah).

Too shy about his physical handicap to declare his love openly, Bates decides to assume the role of a coach for the handsome Chris (played by Ross Rossovich), writing love letters to Roxanne in Chris’s name, and offering general romantic counsel.

In the happy ending, when Roxanne finally discovers that the touching letters are really from Bates, she accepts and loves him for who he really is, and overlooks her nose. Er, I mean, his nose.

There is one particularly hilarious scene in the film in which a jerk in a bar tries to insult Bates. Bates counterattacks with a string of insults, all of them funnier than the original.

This scene illustrates the mischief marketing tactic of making your shortcomings explicit whenever they are so obvious that your prospect can’t ignore them.

In Chapter 16, we'll read about some ex-cons who embezzled millions of dollars. These days, however (now that they're out of jail), they *play up* their faults by advising accountants on how to detect fraud. What they're doing happens also (and perhaps more precisely) to represent an instance of the Judo tactic, however, which is why we put their story in that section rather than in this one.

In *Scared Straight*, we have another illustration of how to use this tactic. The scary-looking prison inmates featured in that film are more successful at "marketing" moral values to kids than many teachers or parents. And why? Because they play up their own faults. They stress very graphically what happened to them as a result of having done a lot of bad things.

Many 12-step programs also employ this tactic. Millions upon millions of people all over the world benefit from 12-step meetings every day, so there can't be much doubt about what enormous power this technique has.

Another thing you might want to observe is this: Playing up your faults is really a kind of credibility-enhancing tactic. That is, people tend to put more stock in what you say if they know you've actually lived through whatever it is you're talking about.

Considering, therefore, that this tactic has something in common with the credibility tactics, and also something in common with the Judo tactic (as noted above), you can begin to sense how hard it is to separate these mischief marketing techniques from one another. They all work together.

Like synonyms with slightly different nuances, they have many things in common — and yet they're all a bit different.

Mischief Marketing Tactic: Doing the Opposite of What They Expect

You know, come to think of it, you could say that most mischief marketing techniques involve at least *some* element of doing the opposite of what people expect.

[... Chapter 12 (print edition) continues at this point ...]

Know anybody struggling to get started on a shoestring budget?

Why not help them get started?

Tell them about *Mischief Marketing!*