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Business



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Expert says 'mischief marketing' can make pitch stand out

09/24/2000

By Carla D'Nan Bass / The Dallas Morning News

Marketing expert Ray Simon urges his colleagues to find their inner child if they want to create the best sales campaigns.

But not the good, well-behaved inner child — the mischievous one.

Mr. Simon's recent book, *Mischief Marketing*, is filled with anecdotes of how everyone from Mother Teresa to Bill Gates has been at least a little mischievous in trying to accomplish goals.

Such techniques are for anyone who has more creativity than money, Mr. Simon said, and Mr. Gates once had very little money.

His "mischief marketing" started as a teenager and involved digging through computer company trash bins, finding discarded programs, fixing the problems and showing the company how he did it, Mr. Simon said. That effort led TRW in Vancouver, Wash., to hire Mr. Gates as a programmer when he was a high school senior.

Mother Teresa is an unlikely marketing role model, Mr. Simon said, but she was good at it.



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On one plane trip, he said, Mother Teresa offered to give up her lunch if the airline would donate the cost to charity. The airline agreed, the rest of the passengers did the same, and Mother Teresa had several hundred more dollars for her charities.

Mr. Simon discussed "mischief marketing" during a recent interview with *The Dallas Morning News*. Here are excerpts:

Q: How do you describe mischief marketing?

A: "Mischief marketing is more about targeting your campaign to a particular individual or to very small groups who may be leveraged in some way. Instead of trying to mass market, you're trying to reach just one person. But sometimes the target can be larger. I do stretch the definition myself sometimes."

Q: Can someone who just wants a normal job use these tips?

A: "Those are really the people I'm trying to reach. I was trying to get just a normal job working with computers once and was having a really hard time. Everyone kept telling me that I had to have 'juice' slang for connections. Finally I sent a six-pack of fruit juice to a very influential person along with a letter saying that I hoped that was enough 'juice' for me to get a job. I had an interview with them and finally ended up getting a job in an indirect way from that meeting."

Q: Is this a new approach?

A: "The thing that I like about mischief marketing is being able to go back and show how it has gone on all through history instead of just saying, 'It's new! It's new!' Benjamin Franklin used a pseudonym on articles to trick his brother the printer into thinking he was a feminist woman so that the article would get printed. George Washington conveniently showed up in Philadelphia in a military uniform just when it was time to choose a commander in chief of the military. He was marketing his availability."

Q: How can one tell when mischief marketing is appropriate to use and when it is not?

A: "I think that mischief marketing is a technique of last resort. If you can do

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something in another way, you ought to. Start out with the conventional routes, and if you are getting nowhere, then resort to this."

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