

Marketing Ethics: It's Not an Oxymoron

By Andy OBryan

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7 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Taking Other People's Money

There are so many offers on the Internet today that its almost impossible for the average consumer to distinguish between whats real and whats pure hype. So its up to you to help them by being as forthright with your product as possible. If you can answer Yes to these questions, then youre doing right by your customers.

Have I personally used the product I'm endorsing?

Before you attach your name and reputation to push a product just to earn an affiliate commission, you need to determine if this product is something that you have or would purchase yourself. This is already a given for many Internet marketers and would hopefully just serve as a reminder. For others, it should be a wake-up call. If I'm a subscriber to your ezine or one of your customers and you aggressively recommend something, I'm assuming that you have tried the product personally. I'm not assuming you're just part of a killer affiliate program. If I then try the product based on your recommendation and it turns out to be garbage, what does that say about our present, and more importantly future, business relationship?

Is there a better way?

Look for alternatives to your plan. Is there another way to profit from this venture without giving even the faintest glimpse of deception? If there is, do it. Don't always go with your first instinct in the marketing arena, because it could be based on flawed experiences. You want to create a long term trust with your customers, so dont start out on the wrong foot. If they ask for a refund, give it. No questions asked. Dont quibble about it. I once tried to get a replacement for a busted audio cassette that I ordered from an online self-help company and they refused. Do you think I will ever do business with them again?

Am I an ethical person in the real world?

So, how are you as a person in general? You're a pretty decent human being I would assume. So if you're good, how could you possibly be practicing unethical behavior with your online business dealings? There's no way, right? Well, this type of thinking can lead you down the wrong path. Things are far from black and white online. There are as many grey areas on the internet as there are grey clouds on a rainy day. Don't assume that everything you do online will automatically be ethical just because you're a good person to the people you meet and deal with in everyday life. You need to constantly ask yourself if what you're doing is morally and ethically acceptable. If you're not sure then it probably isn't.

Am I rationalizing?

A great line in the movie *The Big Chill* was "Have you ever made it through the day without a juicy rationalization?" It's true, we all rationalize various vices every day to make them easier to swallow. But there are some types of online practices that are easy, but dangerous, to justify to yourself. If you can answer Yes to the rationalization question, then you need to re-think what you're doing before it's too late.

Is my conscience being my guide?

Jiminy Cricket was onto something. Look what happened to Pinnochio when he didn't follow his conscience. Norman Vincent Peale said, "Wrongness can never produce rightness--it can only produce wrongness. Rightness produces rightness." I read that to mean that nothing can come of going about things in a morally questionable manner.

Can I sleep at night?

This isn't just a cliché. If you're having trouble sleeping, it could be something you did that is gnawing at your subconscious. While you're lying awake, search your soul for what could be troubling you. Try to make a connection to what you're doing in the waking hours. John Mellencamp, and I'm not sure who else, once said, "An honest man's pillow is his peace of mind." Sleeping isn't the only physical problem that can occur with unethical practices. Anxiety about things you've done can create guilt driven symptoms like headaches, stomach problems and even panic disorder and other long term health issues. Is it worth it?

What would I do if I could do anything?

This is one of the ultimate questions to determine ethical behavior. If you were the King of the World and could do anything and go anywhere you wanted with impunity, what would you do? Would you give to those less fortunate, find cures for diseases and resolve all world conflicts, or would you lounge around all day eating and drinking whatever you wanted with whomever you wanted, going to forbidden places, doing things that you know are wrong?

Think about these questions when determining how you market your services today, tomorrow and for years to come. Do the right thing, and great things will happen.

Andy O'Bryan, a writer, inventor and consultant living in upstate New York, invites you to his web sites:

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