

MONDAY MANNA

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AN UNORTHODOX MARKETING STRATEGY

By Rick Boxx

In the business world it seems normal to emphasise a company's unique qualities and capacities. We try to define our "niche," promote our strengths, and show how we differentiate from our competitors. It is less common, however, for business leaders to publicly acknowledge their weaknesses. They are either ignored or, even worse, disguised or concealed in hope that no one will recognise them.

That is not always the case. One stellar example in America was a nationally known pizza franchise that came to the unsettling realisation that many of its customers disliked the taste of the primary product – pizza. Rather than overlooking the customers' dissatisfaction by attempting slick marketing and repackaging, the company's CEO developed a strategy that brought a remarkable turnaround in a five-year period.

This turnaround began when the company discovered through consumer focus groups what many of its customers really thought about their product, that they did not like the taste of the pizza. Understandably, this was troublesome news – especially when it is the main thing you are selling. What was unusual, however, was how the company responded. Instead of burying this information, the company ran commercials actually allowing customers to express how they thought their pizza tasted. Then, according to the esteemed business periodical, *Wall Street Journal*, the CEO appeared in TV commercials offering an apology along with a promise: "We hear you, America. Sometimes you know you've got to make a change. Please give us another try."

In recent years we have seen and heard news reports about the problems many companies have had with products, whether in manufacturing, design, or quality. Relatively few are as forthright in admitting their failings, promising to make amends, and then taking proactive steps to follow through. In any business, mistakes happen. Sometimes deadlines are missed. We can ignore these problems, offer excuses, or address them directly by acknowledging them and taking appropriate measures to correct the issues. The Bible offers sound advice about this. Here are some examples:

Being forthright is always right. Many of us have heard the saying, "your sins will find you out." Whether it involves building cars, handling investments for others, or manufacturing food products, this is almost always true, as we regularly see in headlines and news reports. Speaking to the nation of Israel, God assured them that obedience would be rewarded. Then they were warned, *"But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out"* (Numbers 32:23).

Honesty requires no apologies. Admitting failings accompanied by a plan to make necessary corrections is always preferable to seeking to hide problems and then having them exposed. *"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion"* (Proverbs 28:13).

Sometimes, as the well-known pizza company demonstrated, the best marketing strategy is to take ownership of the problem, declare it publicly, correct it, and then ask customers for a second chance.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your first reaction when you learn about a problem with a product or service you have been using, especially if they were already aware of it? What kind of response do you expect from the vendor?
2. In your experience, has there been a time when you had to admit to a situation similar to what the pizza company encountered? If so, how have you or your company responded? If not, how do you think you would respond if something like that were to occur?
3. Why are companies typically more inclined to cover up problems rather than being upfront to acknowledge them and explain steps they have planned for making needed changes?
4. Do you agree with the saying, “your sin will find you out,” or are you more aligned with those who would contend, “What the customers do not know will not hurt them”? Explain your answer.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

- Genesis 44:18,
- Proverbs 5:22, 10:9, 11:1, 12:22, 13:6, 19:22, 24:26;
- Isaiah 59:12