

There's an elephant in the room

Malcolm Williams

There is an elephant in the room and its name is 'Christian marketing'. It's an elephant sized issue because it has to do with the way we present ourselves to the outside world. It is in the room and not being talked about because there's confusion and uncertainty over what to think.

For some people the words 'Christian marketing' are offensive. "Christians don't sell, they 'tell'"

Others will say it's the overlooked answer. "In a self-promoting world, Christians must 'become all things to all men' " (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Whilst I certainly don't want to say that marketing is the 'overlooked answer', I want to argue in favour of marketing. Here's what I'm up against:

Marketing:

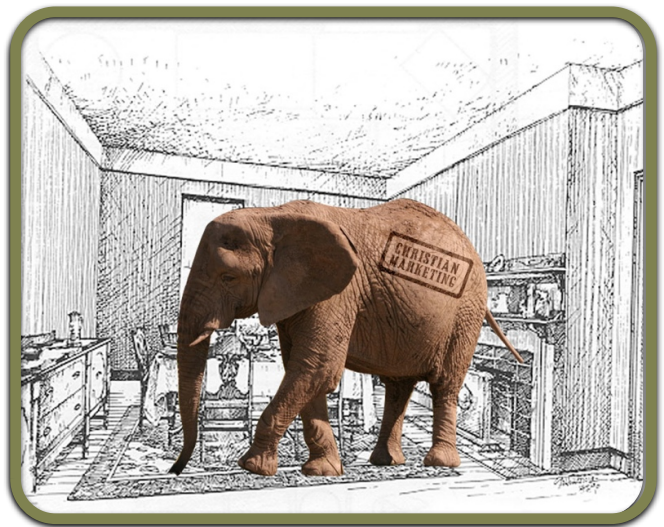
- is an option
- is manipulative and worldly
- means not trusting God
- denies the power of the gospel

Marketing is not an option. Let me begin by saying that marketing is not just a good idea – it's like breathing, we're already doing it – we have to do it. That's because marketing is 'presenting something in its' best light'. We're all doing marketing all of the time.

People choose clothes, houses, cars, accessories – a whole range of things – to present themselves in the best light. We choose vocabulary precisely to present ideas in their best light. We all market.

Marketing is communication. Some of us do it poorly, others better. If we disavow or ignore it then perhaps we're just doing a bad job.

Marketing is not necessarily 'manipulative' or 'worldly'. What marketing does is analyse the art of presentation. It's a self-conscious attempt to be scientific about the art of communication. Yet some Christians don't see this as genuine. They see that being genuine is being unaware of those things we do that present us well. This is just naïve.



If I know that a person is more likely to listen to me if I look them in the eye, does that make me manipulative if I look them in the eye? If tests have been done on the subject, should I now avoid looking in people's eyes because I'm using worldly market research if I do?

The issue is integrity. It always has been and always will be. Self-knowledge and self-awareness are good things. Science teaches us lots about our world including communication. It's what we do with this knowledge that counts.

Trusting God means thanking him for all his blessings. If we're aware of what techniques and tools present us well, this need not undermine our trust in God's power to work through all things. If we receive useful knowledge with thankfulness and put it to

good use, we still need to trust that God will bless.

You can have the best marketing in the world and the greatest integrity, but you still lack one thing: God's particular plan for your situation. His plans quite simply are not ours and even when our hopes conform with his plan, our particular efforts are still in his hands for his use.

113,597 DOCTORS FROM COAST TO COAST WERE ASKED!

Family doctors, surgeons, diagnosticians, nose and throat specialists... doctors in every branch of medicine were asked: "What cigarette do you smoke, Doctor?"

Three nationally known independent research organizations did the asking.

The answers came in by the thousands. Actual statements from doctors themselves. Figures were checked and rechecked! The result? Camels... convincingly!

According to this recent Nationwide survey:

MORE DOCTORS SMOKE CAMELS THAN ANY OTHER CIGARETTE!

This is no casual claim. It's an actual fact. Based on the statements of doctors themselves to three nationally known independent research organizations.

THE QUESTION was very simple. One that you...any smoker... might ask a doctor: "What cigarette do you smoke, Doctor?"

After all, doctors are human too. Like you, they smoke for pleasure. Their taste, like yours, enjoys the pleasing flavor of costlier tobaccos. Their throats too appreciate a cool mildness.

And more doctors named Camels than any other cigarette!

If you are a Camel smoker, this preference for Camels among physicians and surgeons will not surprise you. But if you are not now smoking Camels, by all means try them. Compare them critically in your "T-Zone" (see right).

CAMEL-COSTLIER TOBACCO

THE "T-ZONE" TEST WILL TELL YOU

The "T-Zone" is the throat area you pass through on every cigarette. Only your taste and throat can decide which cigarette comes best to you... how it affects your throat. On the basis of observations of many, many million smokers, we believe Camels will stand your "T-Zone" in a "T."

Marketing does not 'deny the gospel'. Christians are fiercely and rightly committed to trusting in the power of the gospel as God's change agent in a dying world. We trace this trust to places like Romans 1:16 and Acts 4:12.

As a consequence, we're people who want a verbal proposition, a message of historical fact about God and his Son, to govern and frame our communication, especially our evangelism.

Christians want the gospel to be 'unadorned... pure, doctrine of Christ'. Some will say: "The gospel needs no artifice, no

technique... it stands proudly against such things."

This is true. But is lack of 'artifice' perhaps just an excuse for lack of budget ... and lack of any clues to rub together in how to do graphic design and use fonts?

The whole 'marketing denies the gospel' argument is a fob-off. Christians are called to be different but is daggyness the difference we were called to? Boring doesn't equal honest. It just equals boring. Lack of presentation ability doesn't somehow free up the gospel from artifice, it just obscures it in embarrassment.

Nothing we say or do happens in a stylistic or aesthetic vacuum. Decisions about these things happen at the smallest and largest levels all the time. Let's stop pretending that we're not making them and start making good ones.

How important is it that paint is peeling off the pale blue sign out the front of your church and the fonts represent the latest in sixties typography? Well if it wasn't important then I expect most major retail and food outlets wouldn't bother updating their signs. But they do... they seem to think that initial perceptions matter. Why don't we? Because we kid ourselves that it doesn't? "It's the gospel that will bring people to our church." What that kind of sign says to the outsider is that 'no one around here cares - we've given up'.

But hang on - we do care - we care desperately that people hear about Jesus. If we do, then we'll clear any impediment to catch their attention.