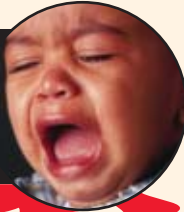




# the MARKETING hot stove theory

*Even the dumbest babies tend to only touch the hot cast iron sides of a wood burning stove one time.*



When I was a kid, we had a big pot-bellied wood stove in the middle of our living room. Wisconsin winters can get mighty cold and this was our only source of heat. We had some bricks on the floor around it, but it had no safety screen to keep people from touching it and getting burned.

Well, it seems that every toddler who ever entered our living room immediately determined that they had to test the hot stove by walking over and touching the cast-

iron side. This was immediately followed by the toddler vocalizing this newfound learning experience by screaming at the top of his or her lungs.

Only the stupid kids touched the hot stove twice. The smart kids touched it once and the message was clear: "Don't touch: hot stove!"

Over the years, restaurant operators have touched the hot stove repeatedly when it comes to marketing. Either they enjoy the pain that is

inflicted upon them or possibly, the message "Don't touch: marketing hot stoves," hasn't been clearly laid out in front of them.

Well, here goes.

**Have the Joint Running Well.**

This applies to the hospitality, quality, service, cleanliness, and overall experience you provide in your restaurant. The caveat to this is: Do it BEFORE you spend money on advertising to drive people in. I see it time and time again. Money gets spent on some kind of campaign to drive in new customers and they show up in droves to a restaurant that is one step away from the city dump.

Let me lay out the series of events. The customers have tried it- they didn't like it- they tell anyone who will listen how bad it was- and you can't figure out why your advertising campaigns are becoming less effective every time you run one. Ugh!

**Get Your Customers Talking About You.**

The most powerful form of advertising for any business happens to be word of mouth advertising. If your place provides a great dining experience for your customers, the word will get out. If you run a pigsty, don't spend any marketing dollars telling people to come lie in the slop with you.

**Cut To The Chase.** Keep messages short, clear, and to the point. Say what you

have to say, in a memorable way, and move on. The average consumer sees, literally, thousands of marketing messages and logos during any given day. Consequently they have lost interest in hearing your personal and business life stories.

**Keep Score.** Knowing what works and what doesn't is important to any business owner. You really don't have the time or the money to continue to use marketing concepts and campaigns that don't drive sales. Don't expect everything you do to be a homerun. Many singles will score runs too. The key to improving performance is to keep score.

Analyzing your marketing and advertising campaign performance can be a bit hairy, but doesn't need to be turned into rocket science either. I try to keep it simple; the more money I spend, the more I expect to impact sales. If I pay for the Cadillac campaign, I don't expect to have vinyl seats.

**Ride a Winning Horse More Than Once.**

Did we improve sales, traffic, customer count, check average, or not? Once you find a successful campaign, use it again and again. There is no reason to stop riding a good horse and there is no reason to beat a horse that can't run.

**Hire a Professional.** A professional, reputable, and experienced marketing team will pay for itself many

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times over. No- you do not need to put them on your payroll. You can retain one of the wonderful firms I am confident are sitting right in your home state or city. Besides, you have plenty of other things to worry about, like improving operations and serving guests and training employees.

**Menu Marketing 101.** Make sure your menu, carry-out menus and menu boards look sharp and are both efficient and effective, not to mention priced right. Think about this, every customer that walks into your restaurant will look at one of these marketing pieces. That's right, your menu, menu boards, and carry-out menu are all marketing pieces.

■ Your menu is no place to leave food samples for future customers to taste test. Keep them clean.

■ If your menu board is backlit, it is meant to have

all the lights working, with no menu slats missing.

■ Your carry-out menu should be kept up to date, if you don't remove it from your menu.

■ Your menu will hopefully be seen by a ton of potential customers and is not the place to try a sloppy copy shop print job. Look sharp and professional.


*In my humble, but accurate opinion:*

Far too many business owners and operators spend far too little time discussing, strategizing, analyzing and executing marketing campaigns and the role it plays in their businesses.

Marketing is both a science and an art and becoming an expert at this game takes time, money,

and effort.

You may want to stay on your toes, because just when you think you have it figured out, something in the marketing game changes.

And you thought the steak you ordered last night at one of your competitors was tough. 

**Look for more Marketing Hot Stoves in the next issue.**



▶ **"HOT STOVE" MARKETING**



1. **Have the Joint Running Well**
2. **Get Your Customers Talking About You**
3. **Cut to the Chase**
4. **Keep Score**
5. **Ride a Winning Horse More Than Once**
6. **Hire A Professional**
7. **Menu Marketing 101**

**SEVEN MORE MARKETING HOT STOVES IN THE NEXT ISSUE...**

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