

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Telemuckraking

Want consumers to respond? Tell them you'll leave them alone

A couple of weeks ago, I woke up at around 6:00, turned on the news, and learned about the FTC's new telemarketing "do not call" list. 2 minutes later, I was on the Internet, and signed up.

Does it make any sense for a guy who works in advertising to not want to be advertised to? Have I turned my back on my direct marketing brethren?

I was not alone. In the first two weeks, 23 million Americans signed up for the "do not call" list. To me, that suggests two things:

- 1) Direct response marketing works—when consumers directly respond to the idea of NEVER getting telemarketing calls again.
- 2) The amazing PR blitz behind the list (it was mentioned in every paper and on every newscast) worked like a charm.

I was getting three calls a week from a company, I won't say their name, I'll just mention their initials— AT&T—trying to get me to sign up for their service. Like surly children clamoring for ice cream, they wouldn't take no for an answer—time and time again.

This kind of marketing is what vexes consumers the most—and makes the entire ad industry look bad. Like junk mail, spam, promotions, and sweepstakes, telemarketing is part of what's termed "below the line" marketing. Why do they call it "below the line?" Simple—the majority of it tends to be below the line of acceptable taste, class, responsibility, and creativity.

Still, every discipline has its staunch defenders. In various interviews, Tim Searcy, Executive Director of the American Teleservices Association, has claimed that this new FTC list is a violation of the First Amendment—and infringes upon commercial free speech rights. And his group is suing the government for that very reason.

I'm not a lawyer, so I don't know if he's got a case. But it's a piss-poor excuse to justify intrusive marketing that people generally don't want.

And that's the problem with our industry as we constantly struggle for respect. Just because something is possible doesn't make it a good idea automatically. Spam is not a good idea. Corporate logos and ads on every inch of public space, Internet pop-up ads, gratuitous product placement, so on and so forth. Many people are sick of this kind of marketing, and when they get an easy chance to stop it, they will.

Most ideas that attempt to "break through the clutter" merely add to the clutter. It seems the only original ideas left in the ad industry involve marketing tricks and techniques that consumers will eventually loathe.

If you're in the position to green light an idea that you as a consumer would rather not receive, simply do one thing:

Opt out.