



Marketing Messages

MARY CHARLESON

Sins, staples and small pleasures on consumer wish lists

It's official south of the boarder, and likely to touch down here at some point in the future. The "R-word" has landed. In recessions our purchase habits go astray. In an economy build on buying stuff, that can cause havoc, especially an economy where many purchases straddle the line between unnecessary and totally unnecessary. The trick for marketers is to acknowledge where consumers might be at, while not sending them into panic. The best recession campaigns won't mention the economy. They'll entertain, humour, empower and make people feel normal, while reserving an undercurrent that things aren't exactly normal.

Last month I predicted five themes that would emerge in marketing with a down economy. I received a lot of feedback, so this month we'll dig a little deeper on the subject. A review of the five trends:

- #1. **A backlash against anything big and corporate.** Patronizing local business will become fashionable as people seek to support those in their own community. Companies with a social strategy that supports the community will fare better.
- #2. **A sentiment of anti-consumerism.** Companies who push product blatantly will experience a backlash.
- #3. **Value of life's precious moments.** Think family, friends and experiences. Out with material possessions, in with the warm and fuzzy. Marketers who key in on this sentiment will be better positioned in the coming months.
- #4. **Low cost and high value offerings.** When times get tougher people become price conscious. Thrift becomes fashionable. Perceived value and exceptional service will become increasingly important in the luxury market.
- #5. **Humour and escapism as themes.** Companies, who can entertain and make people laugh with their messages, will benefit amidst serious economic threats.

While big expenditures will be less in vogue for many, people will always pay for SIN, STAPLES, and SMALL PLEASURES in a quest for an escape. Sins are those things like alcohol, chocolate, lottery tickets, tobacco and other items that they could cut out, but won't sacrifice easily. Staples are food, household cleaning and personal care items, shelter and basic transportation. Small pleasures are the things that make you feel decadent while not breaking bank. Think \$1 loonie lattes (do they exist? they should!), \$20 family movie nights, pedicures, clothing accessories (rather than buy the whole new outfit), haircuts, keeping in touch with family and friends etc. Sin, staples and small pleasures are pretty recession proof. They will be the secret to marketing in a tougher economy.

But what if you're not in the sin, staples and small pleasures business? Anyone can take advantage of these areas; you just need to rethink the way you market. One company doing this is **Aeroplan**. Having recently gone public and no longer being linked to Air Canada, their new branded tag line is now simply "Rewarding life." With 4 million members, 93% of whom are in Canada, and 22% penetration of Canadian households, their rewards based loyalty program is all about adding SMALL PLEASURES to life. They have gone well beyond air travel and accommodation as rewards, to offer everyday items such as TV's, iPods, entertainment tickets, cameras, bikes, appliances and a whole lot more. But here's where it gets interesting. They are tying the earning of SMALL PLEASURES into the purchase of STAPLES. An agreement with **Sobey's** groceries has put this in place. You can buy a necessary item such as food and get small pleasures for free. It's a brilliant move in recessionary times. The whole notion of travel and material goods as rewards offers "Escapism" and "Value in life's precious moments" while being delivered through small pleasures, which ties back nicely to the five trends.

Might there be a small pleasure angle to your business? Give it some thought or better yet, email me and tell me your story of how you're positioning yourself for this trend. Want more insights? Visit my website: www.charleson.ca and hit the newsletter subscribe button top left. Marketing trends and research will be delivered to your inbox weekly.

Mary Charleson, President of Charleson Communications, is a marketing strategist, speaker, and consultant. She writes monthly and can be reached at mary@charleson.ca