

RANDOM

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August 2005

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

Advertising and deception

Last month I talked about a marketing plan that, if implemented, has the ambitious goal of turning a \$1.5 million operation into a \$3.0 million operation within a year. The plan has an advertising component, a public relations component, and a direct-response component. It does not have a falsehood and deception component.

In fact, the company's legal counsel, who happens to be a vice president, recently sent a detailed memo to all division managers to discuss truth and advertising. The company's ads have always been honest and I'm delighted to be associated with people who feel so strongly about it that they put the policy in writing.

It's a simple policy

If advertisers would abide by the three basic guidelines that were on the first page of the attorney's 8-page document (which dealt with more than just truthful advertising), people would be less skeptical of the advertising profession.

Here are the 3 guidelines: (1) The communication as a whole should be truthful, (2) The communication as a whole should not be misleading, and (3) Each statement of fact should be substantiated by adequate evidence. This could be made even shorter ("Don't lie!") but I consider it an impressive feat for an attorney to reduce the policies to 3 simple sentences.

I thought about these policies a few times recently when I ran across advertising that is probably "letter-of-the-law" legal, but hardly ethical.

A camera you don't want

Anytime I see an advertisement for a camera in a general interest magazine, I'm a bit suspicious. Legitimate camera manufacturers tend to place their ads in camera magazines and, increasingly, in computer and other electronics publications.

The ad at the right is from a company I'll call Hell+Bowel (not the company's real name). They're offering the camera for \$300 (1) and suggesting (but not claiming) that it might actually be worth three times that. It's not. (2) "This camera has 3X the detail-resolution of many digital cameras." No other camera is named. "Digital-resolution",

an utterly meaningless term, is not defined. (3) "[U]p to 8x digital zoom ..." In other words, there is no optical zoom. Digital zoom is useless and does nothing but degrade the image quality. This tells me that I can buy an equivalent camera for \$60 to \$100. (4) "Yet it has an amazing 16MB of built-in flash memory to store up to 160 photographs depending on resolution." That's amazing, all right. Even the cheapest cameras these days come with at least a 32MB memory card. As for 160 photos in 16MB, that works out to 100K per image. That's a far cry from the "10 mega pixel" resolution that the ad prominently promises. (5) They warn that the inventory will sell out fast. Recall that P.T. Barnum said there's a fool born every minute. (6) The camera "uses interpolation" to achieve 10.0 "mega pixels". Aha! Here's the explanation: The camera creates tiny images that are then expanded. If you ever owned a camera that used 110-size film and tried to make an 11x14 print from it, you'll have an idea of the quality. (7) Again, the camera offers only useless "digital zoom", not "optical zoom". (8) They'll throw in a useless table-top tripod and a carrying case worth \$30, too. This really is your lucky day!

It's a most beatable price.

Despite what the headline says, the price can easily be beaten. The camera you get for \$300 won't be a 10 megapixel camera, but then neither is the Hell+Bowel unit. It will take clear, sharp pictures that you'll be able to enlarge to at least 8x10, which the Hell+Bowel unit won't.

Examples: For \$250, you can buy a Nikon Coolpix 5600, 5.1 megapixel camera with 3x optical zoom or a Konica Minolta DiMAGE G600, 6.0 megapixel camera with 3x optical zoom. For \$300, you can buy a Kodak EasyShare Z700, 4.0 megapixel camera with 5x optical zoom or a Nikon Coolpix 5900, 5.1 megapixel, camera with 3x optical zoom. For \$285, you can buy a Fujifilm FinePix S5100, 4.0 megapixel camera with 10x optical zoom.

Any of these cameras would be far superior to the \$300 camera that Hell+Bowel claims is such a bargain.

Most people could spend less than \$300 and still get a better camera. If the pictures you take will never be printed larger than 5x7, you'll do fine with a 2 megapixel camera and you'll find those for \$100 to \$150.



Deception on the Web

With little regulation, the Internet and the World Wide Web are a festering mess. If the crooks (spam, phishing) and the charlatans (“free” gifts that aren’t free or gifts) continue to thrive, a powerful tool will be lost.

The operation I’m about to describe is almost certainly operating within the letter of the law, but one simple test let me know almost instantly that they were willing to lie to me. I was looking for someone to repair my younger daughter’s Ipod, the one that returned a bit worse for the experience after she was caught in a torrential downpour. IPods, when filled with water, do not work well.

online reward center everyone deserves a reward

Participate Now & Receive Your FREE* iPod® Photo!

Apple® iPod® Photo 60GB

- Razor sharp LCD display
- Holds up to 15,000 songs or 25,000 photos
- \$449.99 Retail - Yours FREE*

Check below to see if this promotion is available for your area:

Enter Your Zip Code

Welcome

Welcome to Online Reward Center, our mission is to deliver free* gift incentives to qualified consumers who participate in marketing promotions and surveys.

Online Reward Center is currently looking for consumers across the U.S. in leading markets that meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Age 18 years and older
- Legal resident of the United States
- Valid email & shipping address

You must live in an area where Online Reward Center is conducting incentive promotions to be eligible. Upon completion of participation requirements, Online Reward Center will send the free* gift to you with free shipping!

Free Shipping by: **FedEx**

A Google search returned several paid advertisements, one of which suggested that I could get a free 30GB photo Ipod. So I clicked the link to take a look. All I had to do was see if I lived in an eligible Zip code, so I “accidentally” typed “00000” instead of my real Zip code. Even though Zip code 00000 doesn’t exist, it turned out that I was eligible! Oh, joy! It must be my lucky day!

online reward center everyone deserves a reward

Congratulations! This promotion is available for consumers in 00000!

online reward center everyone deserves a reward

Congratulations! This promotion is available for consumers in 00000!
How dumb !

So it was clear that the website (OnlineRewardCenter.com) was willing to lie to me just so I would continue. I then tried the Zip code “YouLie” and that was OK, too. So was “How dumb”

So I decided to use Zip code 00000 and completed the application with an address that doesn’t exist and a special e-mail address (goofball@blinn.com) that I could easily monitor.

I clicked a series of obscure links, read all the rules, and learned that to “earn” the “free” Ipod I would have to complete several additional steps. Clearly, the first steps involved obtaining and using a Discover card, signing up for the BMG Music Club, and more. The final step wasn’t disclosed anywhere, but given the organization’s location probably

*Receipt of the free incentive gift requires: 1.) Completion of offer terms, including age and residency requirements; shipping address verification; and registration with a valid email address 2.) Completion of user survey. 3.) Participation in sponsor offers. Upon completion of participation requirements, we will ship the incentive gift to you with free shipping.

online reward center everyone deserves a reward

Congratulations! This promotion is available for consumers in 00000!

By participating in our Incentive Promotion, the gift Apple® iPod® Photo 60GB will be yours to keep.

Please provide shipping details for your gift below:

Email address:

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Street Address:

City:

State/Province:

Country:

Zip/Postal Code:

Phone Number:

Date of Birth:

By submitting, I certify that I am a US Resident over the age of 18, and I agree to the incentive promotion participation terms.

This Incentive Promotion is made possible through the generous sponsorship by:



involves a trip to Florida for a high-pressure sales visit to look at some swampland. I also noticed that by starting the process I had opted in for spam and within 90 minutes, I had received my first spam to the address.

Google’s response and responsibility

You might wonder why Google allows companies such as this (not exactly illegal, but certainly misleading) to participate in the sponsored links program. I wondered, too, and I asked Google. I had to ask twice, but finally received a generic response that essentially said they’ll look into it, but I shouldn’t hold my breath.

Google can’t vet every advertiser, of course, but you’d think they would work quickly to rid the service of the liars. All Google has to sell is its reputation and its public perception. If Google loses the public’s trust by continuing to accept money for questionable deals such as this they may find that the business model is not sustainable.

A month later, a similar Google search produced the same ad that’s still using the same deceptive techniques. **B**

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

A.J. Noted a statement by A. G. Lafley, CEO of Procter & Gamble in a recent issue of Fortune: “The measure of a powerful person is that their circle of influence is greater than their circle of control.”