



The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
by Murray Raphel,
Chairman, Raphel Marketing**

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The Greeks Had a Word for It

When Aeschylus and Sophocles were the leading playwrights in ancient Greek theatre, the actors in their dramas and comedies wore masks.

Their purpose was two-fold: 1) the masks amplified the actors' voices so they could be heard everywhere in the theatre, and 2) the masks could be seen even in the last row and the audience would know the character's emotions – happy, angry, arrogant or disappointed. The most common masks were comedy and tragedy, still seen today.

Which brings us to a major problem with much of today's advertising, marketing and promotion.

Too many businesses put on the “happy” mask to sell us their product only to have the consumer, after receiving the product, find they are wearing a “disappointed” mask.

A few years ago the Gallup Organization polled Americans to find which professions rated highest in “honesty and ethical standards.” Top of the list were “doctors.” Bottom of the list were “advertising executives.”

At an American Federation meeting in Portland, Stephen Bergerson told attendees, “People increasingly don't like advertising. And more and more they believe it less and less.”

His warning: “Never trick the customer. And deliver what you promise.”

Which brings us to today and brought Vrest Orton in the past to Freeport, Maine.

Vrest developed The Original Vermont Country Store in Weston, Vermont, population 400. People vacationing in Vermont dropped in and bought his turn-of-the-century eclectic and nostalgic selection of near-forgotten merchandise, including Lifebuoy soap, Buster Brown socks, Pure Cola syrup, record players and candy remembered only from your childhood (walnettos, sen sen, Mary Janes).

Through the years he built a list of customers who shopped in his store. He decided to send them a catalogue of his merchandise so they could order through the mail.

Not sure how to begin, he contacted a Maine neighbor, L. L. Bean, who had a major success in mail order. He arranged an appointment. He went to see him with sharpened pencils and notepads ready for instructions.

He told Mr. Bean what he wanted to do. The well-known entrepreneur listened carefully and then said, "Just write down one sentence and you can go back home. Here it is: 'Make sure the story isn't better than the store.'"

What was he saying? This: Whatever you promise the customer, you must deliver.

Or, in contradiction to the Greek actors: "Don't hide who you really are behind a mask."

When advertising, marketing or promoting your business, put yourself in the mind of the consumer. Is what you're offering clear, concise and easily understandable? Or are there caveats written in tiny, unreadable print that contradict the benefit of the headline?

Here are some examples of advertisements that deceive.

A hotel in the Catskill Mountains of New York advertised a promotion in a newspaper's travel section offering its "special" room for only \$78.

Great value.

But wait, at the bottom of the ad, printed in such small type it required a magnifying glass to read, was the first mask: "Double occupancy required." Oops. That meant the rate was NOT \$78, but, in reality, \$156 for two. Keep reading. The next phrase was another mask: "Minimum three night reservation required." That meant the rate was actually \$468. NOT \$78.

Here's another: An ad on TV offered an automobile dealer's new car lease for "a low monthly cost of \$299."

Keep reading. You also need "\$999 for a down payment and \$1,386 due at signing."

Why not tell me the real price? If I don't trust the retailer from the ad it runs, will I trust the retailer for anything else it offers when it is hiding behind the mask of "look at this bargain?" Which it isn't.

Next: We received an e-mail advertisement I did not want. On the bottom of the message it gave a web site to contact if I wanted to be off their list. We hit the site. Back comes the message: "The specified server could not be found."

Liar, liar, pants on fire...

GE knows how to handle this problem. They sent me an offer for light bulbs, instructing me to print out the coupon from my computer. Didn't work. They said if it didn't work to send my e-mail address and they'd mail me the

coupon. I did. They did. In 48 hours.

Time to Put on a Happy Face!

Is there a word, definition or characteristic that applies to a business that promises one thing, but delivers another?

Yes. It was given to the characters in the Greek plays that wore the masks. The name is defined today as a person who puts on a false appearance of a virtue. The Greek word for it: Hypocrite.