

Marketing Communication: Sin Appeal

We made a decision when our children were young to drop cable TV in favor of videos and DVDs for family viewing. When we visit friends or family we will sometimes watch the regular TV programming with them and it is always a shock! We are shocked not only at the content of most of the shows – the language, the so-called “mature content” which is the code word for foul language, gratuitous violence and/or steamy sexual content which would have been considered pornography not that many years ago – but we are shocked at the content of the advertising too.

Since the Super Bowl is the most-watched event on TV, it has become a showcase, even a contest, for advertisers to display their genius. Increasingly, these commercials push the envelope for overt sensuality, frat-house crudeness and blatant materialism. If someone would have told me even 5 years ago that I would be subjected to a barrage of commercials for erectile dysfunction while sitting with my family to watch a football game I would have said they were crazy! Look, actually don't look, at what magazine publishers put on their covers to entice their purchase – in the grocery store line no less! The top search term on the Internet is “sex.” If the advertising is not sexual in nature, then it is designed to make us covet material stuff or egotistical things like power and prestige.

Companies do not spend millions of dollars on advertising targeted to our fleshly desires because they have a liberal, moral or political agenda, they advertise this way **because it works!**

In this study we will discover why it works, how Christians should respond to it, and how Christian marketers should be different.

Romans 1:22-32

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.
24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.

Lets start by getting our theology right on the subject and there's no better place than the book of Romans, Paul's great teaching on Christian doctrine. He is writing to believers, most of whom were Greeks (non-Jewish), although there were also Jewish believers living in Rome.

Leader: Have everyone open their Bibles to Romans 1:15-32 and ask someone to read it aloud.

OBSERVE / DISCUSS

In verses 16-17, why is Paul eager to preach the gospel, and what do we learn about the gospel?

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; [they are] gossips,

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who

Someone read from their Bible Psalm 97:6. In verses 18-20 from Romans 1, why does Paul say that they are without excuse regarding God? Who are the "they?"

Someone please read Romans 2:14-15. What is another reason "all are without excuse?"

The Greek word translated "suppress" in verse 18 means to hold down, like a helmsman who struggles to steer his ship against the current. Interpret what Paul is saying regarding the truth.

In verse 21, what was the response to this knowledge of God?

*Leader: Read Romans 1:22-32 from the side panel and ask the group to mark and say aloud **exchanged** and **gave them over**.*

practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Fill in this chart what you observe about these words.

	exchanged what for what	gave them over to what
v23-24		
v25-26		
v26-28		

What does the phrase "gave them over" imply about the nature of man and the nature of God?

What is the natural pattern of those who refuse to honor God?
Read James 1:13-16.

Who is responsible for it working this way?

Why do you think it works this way?

Paul then gets into some heavy theology about sin, grace and the

true intent of the Law. Since man's natural bent (known as our sin nature) is to sin, Paul anticipates and answers a series of rhetorical questions regarding our accountability for our sin despite our sin nature and despite the fact that God uses our unrighteousness to demonstrate His righteousness. He dismisses the ridiculous notion that sin isn't a big deal, even though it does create opportunities for God's wonderful grace to abound and His perfect righteousness to shine. He slams the idea that since we cannot keep the Law in our own strength, therefore the Law can be ignored. And He also refutes the other side of that argument which says it is the Law's fault that I sin because it wouldn't be sin if the Law didn't say it was sin.

Leader: Ask everyone to open their Bibles and follow as you read Romans 7:14-8:15. Individually, take a few minutes to answer these next questions on your own.

Describe Paul's struggle in your own words (7:14-23)

Can you relate to this struggle?

What is God's answer to the struggle? (7:24-8:4)

How should this affect how we live and walk? (8:5-8)

How, or actually Whom, makes it possible to live and walk differently? (8:9-15)

Leader: Ask the group to share their answers. Ask someone to read Galatians 5:16-25 from their Bible and relate this discussion.

Okay, let's recap what we've discovered in Romans and relate this theology to our study of marketing.

1. Every human being has an innate awareness of God and is without excuse for unrighteous behavior.
2. The natural desire of man is to serve himself rather than God.
3. The natural pattern of unredeemed man is a downward spiral of increasing unrighteousness, wickedness and immorality.
4. Jesus Christ has won the victory and set us free from the bondage of sin.
5. However, a civil war rages in the heart of every believer – the flesh, a defeated but determined foe, wars against the desire to live righteously.
6. The Holy Spirit enables us to win this civil war if we align ourselves with Him versus our fleshly desires.

What does this have to do with marketing you ask? On which side of the war is the kind of marketing which appeals and tempts the flesh to lust after physical, material and prideful things? Why?

Let's take a closer look at what the Bible teaches about these three "categories" of sin.

Leader: Read the context box and 1 John 2:15-17 on the side panel to the left and have the group say aloud and mark the

1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 And the world is passing away, and [also] its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

world.

CONTEXT

1 John 5:13 reveals this book was written to believers so we can know we have eternal life by the evidence of our changed life. You've heard the phrase "practice makes perfect," but in spiritual matters it is "perfect makes practice." We have been made perfect in God's eyes when we receive His gift of forgiveness and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and we will live differently in practice because of the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The changed life, marked by obedience to God, is wonderfully comforting evidence that we are saved.

This passage explains the Christian's changed relationship to the world. In this context the world represents the present world system that is controlled by Satan and the desires of the flesh.

List what you learn about the world in this passage.

In verse 15, what is the command?

In verse 16, why is this command given?

How does John categorize what is in the world?

This is Satan's standard playbook of how to tempt human beings.

Read from your Bible Genesis 3:1-6 and see if you can find Satan's use of this three-pronged strategy against Adam and Eve.

Read Job 1:6-12 from your Bible – which tactic did he try first?

Now read Job 2:3-7 – which tactic did he try second?

Finally, read Job 30:1-15 – Job is referring to his three friends who supposedly came to comfort him – which tactic did Satan try here?

Read Matthew 4:1-10 and see if you can find Satan's playbook when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

Let's take a closer look at these three temptation categories from our passage in 1 John and relate them to our topic of marketing.

Lust of the flesh

Lust is a controlling desire, a coveting, a passionate longing for something that is forbidden. It is also an inordinate appetite for something that is permitted. In Hebrew, the word translated "lust" is also translated "desirable" depending on its context. The flesh in this passage represents our physical body's needs and desires, our sensual **passions**.

Complete the following chart by reading from your Bible the verses given and listing what you discover about (1) the God-ordained physical needs and desires that God designed into us, (2) the related lusts for these things because of sin, and (3) God's

parameters to meet these needs in a holy manner.

God-ordained physical needs/desires	Ungodly lust (sensuality)	Godly desire (image-bearer)
Sexual desire 1 Cor 7:1-9, Gen 1:28	Romans 1:24, 1 Tim 4:1-5 1 Thess 4:1-8, Lev 18:6-23	1 Cor 7:1-9, Hebrews 13:4
Food, drink and clothing Matt 6:25-32	Proverbs 23:20-21 1 Timothy 4:1-5 1 Timothy 2:9	Matt 6:33-34, Luke 22:18 2 Thess 3:10 1 Timothy 2:9, 4:4-5 1 Cor 6:19, Acts 10:9-15 1 Tim 5:23
Health Psalm 30 Ephesians 5:28-30 Isa 38:1-, Rev 21:3-4, 3 John 2	2 Chronicles 16:12 Leviticus 19:31, Psa 38:1, Psa 90:10, 1 Cor 9:24-27	James 5:14-16 1 Timothy 5:23, 4:7-9 2 Timothy 4:6, 2 Cor 12:7, John 9:1, Heb 9:27, 1 Cor 15:42

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

18 Flee immorality. Every [other] sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

*Leader: Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and mark and say aloud **flee**.*

What should our response be to the lusts of the flesh?

Luke 17:1-3

1 And He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!

2 "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble .

3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

What should we do when commercials or advertisements tempt us to lust after a woman in our hearts, to lust for gluttony and drunkenness and carousing good times, to lust for the perfection of our bodies?

How do marketers use these "lusts of the flesh?"

*Leader: Read Luke 17:1-3 and say aloud and mark the phrase **woe to him**.*

Apply this passage to our marketing study and the lusts of the flesh. What are the stumbling blocks?

Who will be judged?

What is our responsibility to one another?

Okay, we've considered "what not to do" regarding marketing to the lusts of the flesh, but does God's Word give us instruction on how we can market products and services to meet these legitimate physical needs and desires in a godly manner?

Leader: Read Philippians 4:8 and say aloud and number the things listed.

List the eight things that we should let our mind dwell on and also

Philippians 4:8

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

the opposite that we should not dwell on.

	Dwell on ...	Do not dwell on ...
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Discuss how the principle of Philippians 4:8 applies to marketing in general, and the marketing of products and services to meet physical needs and desires in particular. Give examples.

Summarize from our study the **biblically-based principle** that should guide our marketing strategies and techniques regarding products and services that meet **legitimate physical needs and desires?**

Let's move on to the next category of temptations in Satan's evil playbook.

Lusts of the eyes

This is a great desire, a coveting, a passionate longing for material things that becomes an obsession, a controlling desire for **possessions**.

Complete the following chart by reading from your Bible the verses

given and listing what you discover about (1) the God-ordained material needs and responsibilities that God designed into us, (2) the related lusts for these things because of sin, and (3) God's parameters to meet these needs in a holy manner.

God-ordained material needs / desires / responsibilities	Ungodly lust (materialism)	Godly desire (stewardship)
Dominion over creation Genesis 1:26-30 Deuteronomy 1:8 Romans 13:1-4	abuse of authority Ex 20:17, 1 Peter 2:1-3 1 Kings 21:1-16	stewardship 1 Chronicles 4:10 2 Corinthians 10:13-18 1 Corinthians 4:2, Pr 12:10, Gen 2:15, Luke 22:24-30
Material needs Php 4:10-20, Matt 6:25-32	Wants Matthew 6:25-32, Pr 30:7-9, Php 4:6, Eph 4:28	Trust and Contentment Matthew 6:33-34, Php 4:11-13, 1 Th 4:9-12
Surplus Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Pr 13:23, 1 Chron 4:10, Pr 10:22	Hoard Ex 20:17, Micah 2:1-3 Ephesians 4:28, Jam 5:1-6, Eccl 4:8, 5:10, 1 Tim 6:7-11, Pr 21:5	Give Proverbs 21:20 2 Corinthians 8 Proverbs 30:7-9, 1 Tim 6:18, 2 Cor 9:6-15, Mal 3:8-12

Matthew 6:19-24

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22 "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

*Leader: Read Matthew 6:19-24 and say aloud and mark the commands in this passage, and also the word **eye**.*

List the do's and do not's in this passage.

Do	Do not

What role do our eyes play in this?

We live in a world filled with all sorts of alluring things to see - beautiful, enticing, pleasing things – but also very distracting things. Television, billboards, advertisements, movies, magazines, and the Internet constantly display treasures belonging to this life and this life only. How can we keep our vision spiritually clear? Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and then 2 Corinthians 4:18 from your Bible and answer this question.

Take a moment or two and ask the Lord to give you a spiritual "eye exam." How clear is your vision? Which master are you serving?

Discuss how this applies to the marketing of products and services. Give examples of marketing techniques and messages that are designed to arouse the "lusts of the eyes" and contrast with how a marketing might inform instead in the following chart.

Arouse	Inform
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Read aloud Luke 17:1-3 on page 9. How does the Lord feel about the person who causes another to stumble using these arousal methods?"

Summarize from our study the **biblically-based principle** that should guide our marketing strategies and techniques regarding products and services that meet **legitimate material needs and desires?**

Let's move on to the third temptation strategy.

Boastful pride of life

This is the vain pursuit of honors and glories and splendors of this life – a lusting, a controlling desire for **position**.

List examples of these kinds of positional desires in the chart and then contrast with examples of boastful pride versus godly desire.

God-ordained responsibilities	Ungodly lust (egotism)	Godly desire (humility)
Image bearer Genesis 1:26,27, Psa 8	Boast in ourselves Psychology – study of self Romans 1:25, Gen 3 Genesis 11:1-7	Boast in God 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 1 Peter 2:21, 3 John 1:11
Authority given 1 Corinthians 11:1-3 Hebrews 13:17 Romans 13:1, Eph 6:5-9	Abuse of authority Mark 10:35-45 John 10:1-18, Ezek 34:1-14	Servant Leadership 1 Peter 5:1-7, Lk 12:35-48, 14:7-14
Gifted for service Exodus 36:1-2 Be excellent at what we do 1 Corinthians 12:1,4-7, Ex 31:1-6, 35:20-36:6, 2 Tim 3:16-17, Heb 13:20-21	Misuse of gifts Exodus 32:1-4, Gen 11:1-9, Eccl 2, 12 Daniel 4:28-37 1 Corinthians 12:12-31	Stewardship of gifts Pr 22:29, Col 3:22-24, 1 Cor 14:12, Ps 78:72, 1 Kings 3:3-13

The world says exalt yourself ... get to the top ... be the top dog ...
 make something of yourself ... accomplish great things ... be
 recognized ... be proud of who you are ... look out for number one

1 Peter 5:5-7

5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,
7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

... you can make it happen.

Leader: Read 1 Peter 5:5-7 and observe what the Word of God says about this self-exaltation.

Interrogate the command in verse 6:

Who? When?

What? Why?

Where? How?

Discuss how this applies to the marketing of products and services. Give examples of marketing techniques and messages that are designed to arouse the "boastful pride of life."

Leader: Ask someone to read Philippians 3:1-14 and as a group list the things Paul could have had confidence in.

How did he come to view these things?

Why?

What do you place your confidence in?

Summarize from our study the **biblically-based principle** that should guide our marketing strategies and techniques regarding products and services that meet **legitimate positional needs and desires?**

What does God's Word say about marketing our Christianity?

God-ordained responsibilities	Temptation to sin (For our gain)	Godly Approach (For gain of others)
Galatians 6:9-10	1 Tim 6:3-10	Colossians 4:2-6
	1 Peter 5:1-4	Romans 10:8-17
Matthew 28:18-20	Titus 1:7-11	2 Corinthians 10:12-18
	Romans 1:16	Colossians 3:22-4:1 Proverbs 22:29
Matthew 5:13-16		

Leader: Ask someone to read from their Bible Matthew 18:1-9.

Relate this verse to what we have been studying about the three temptation categories and marketing. In summary, what are the potential stumbling blocks in marketing?

What does the Word say about that man through whom these stumbling blocks come?

Is it enough that our marketing does not cross the line into overt attempts to inappropriately arouse "sin appeal?"

Proverbs 27:2

2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips

I believe it is entirely appropriate and acceptable for Christian businesses to market their products and services as long as we follow the principles from God's Word that we just discovered. However, there is an interesting verse in the book of Proverbs that suggests an even better way.

Leader: Read Proverbs 27:2 and discuss how this applies to our marketing.

Take a minute or two to restate this proverb into a marketing principle for your business.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES DISCOVERED

- Apart from Jesus Christ, **man is enslaved by sin** and willfully in a downward physical and spiritual death spiral.
- **Jesus Christ has freed us** from this bondage of sin and the **Holy Spirit empowers us** to live according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh.
- However, even for the Christian **a battle rages** between the sin nature and desires of the flesh and the new nature and control of the Spirit.
- Satan's playbook hasn't changed from the beginning.
 - He uses **sensualism**, a controlling **passion (lust of the flesh)** to tempt us to fulfill our God-given physical needs and desires in an ungodly manner.
 - He uses **materialism**, a controlling desire for **possessions (lust of the eyes)** to tempt us to fulfill our God-given material needs in an ungodly manner.
 - He uses **egotism**, a controlling desire for **position (boastful pride of life)** to tempt us to fulfill our God-given responsibilities and emotional needs in an ungodly manner.
- We are to **actively avoid these temptations**, and certainly not use them for our own gain, but rather **dwelt on God-honoring things**.

BUSINESS APPLICATION

1. Marketing to "sin appeal" is effective because of our sin nature, the love of the world and all that is in the world, and Satan's temptations.
2. God will judge those who market this way and cause others to stumble.
 - a. Does my marketing use "sin appeal" to draw attention to my product or service?
 - b. Is my marketing designed to arouse ungodly physical or emotional responses?
 - c. Does my marketing pass the "Philippians 4:8" test?
3. If I cannot succeed without marketing using "sin appeal", should I even be in this business? If my product or service is not useful enough to be marketed on its true merits, is this a business I should be in as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

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