

MARTIN WILLOUGHBY'S LEADING THE WAY

Carter executes detailed plan perfectly

Marketing is a very common business concept, but one that I find is interpreted and applied very differently by business people. Marketing is often seen as a luxury, and not a necessity, so it is often first on the chopping block during budget cuts.



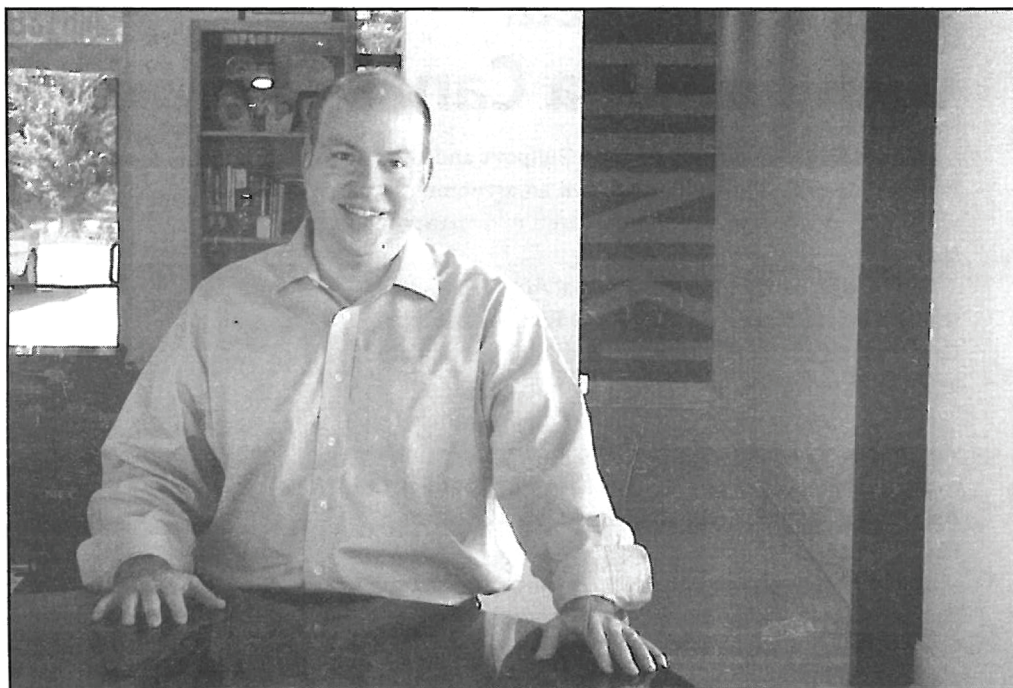
M. Willoughby

Hundreds, if not thousands, of marketing books are published each year trying to influence the way business leaders plan and execute their marketing strategies. Over the years, Al Ries, Jack Trout, Robert Cialdini and Seth Godin are a few of the authors and consultants that have risen above the pack to make a major impact on the way we think about marketing. For most entrepreneurs who don't have a direct background in marketing, sorting through the various theories of marketing can be a difficult thing. Part of the confusion lies in how we think about advertising, public relations, sales, and marketing.

I recently spoke with Bryan Carter, founder of thinkWEBSTORE.com, to get his thoughts on how entrepreneurs should approach their marketing strategies. Carter has a very interesting background in design, technology, psychology, and business. His experiences include being a national consultant and speaker, authoring journal and industry articles, working for a large advertising agency, and developing award winning multimedia learning tools. In 2007, he opened thinkWEBSTORE.com with a clear purpose in mind — to offer a “one-stop shop” for businesses and their marketing needs. The services offered include marketing strategy, website design and hosting, search engine optimization and marketing, e-mail marketing and advertising services for small and mid-sized businesses. Part of what makes Carter's business model different is that he provides these services from a retail location versus a traditional office environment. Carter's success is no accident. He knew his target market and designed a whole business around meeting the needs of that underserved market. Carter leveraged his experience and expertise in planning out the entire business concept in great detail and now has executed that plan diligently.

Many service professionals suffer from the “cobbler who has no shoes” problem, but Carter has certainly avoided that and done an excellent job of marketing his own business. Even though the economy tanked soon after it opened, thinkWEBSTORE.com is ahead of its goals, and Carter anticipates executing soon on his plans to expand the concept regionally and nationally. According to Carter, “Marketing is how you put all the pieces together of advertising, PR and sales. It is your overall strategy, which should be consistent and well thought out.” Carter described advertising as the tool that gets people to your door and sales as a delivery mechanism. Marketing, he emphasized, is where you “think through the details of your business including such things as pricing, positioning and delivery ability.” He also noted that while marketing is comprehensive, it does not have to be complicated. Carter also believes that a company's website, regardless of the type of business, is really the core that should be used as a guide for all other aspects of marketing.

Operating a service business, Carter noted that he emphasizes quality as they key. In order to do that, he has a simple credo for his employees: Be aware; Think things through, and Own it! He point-



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ed out that when you are aware and think things through, owning the issue is usually not a problem. I see many businesses where a lack or “ownership” is a major problem. Lack of ownership leads to no accountability, which usually results in disastrous results both for both customers and the company. Ultimately, Carter's passion and business is about helping entrepreneurs help themselves. Many business owners come to thinkWEBSTORE.com with ideas and dreams, and Carter and his team help them accomplish them.

I am inspired by the detailed thought and planning that Carter puts into his business. For entrepreneurs and business people, I think we can all do better at being more diligent in thinking through the details of our business.

This type of planning is a fluid and ongoing process, and one which is important for the long term success of a venture. For me, it involves a bit of a paradigm shift to try and clearly see a business through the eyes of the clients and prospective clients. Truly great businesses see this view. They design not only their products and services, but the entire experience to maximize it for their clientele. I am sure that we will continue to see the impact of Carter's attention to this detail in the success of his business and his client's businesses in the years to come.

Martin Willoughby, a business lawyer in Jackson, is a regular contributing columnist for the Mississippi Business Journal. He can be reached at mew@msbusinesslaw.com.

Up Close With ...
BRYAN CARTER

Age: 43
Business: thinkWEBSTORE.com (Ridgeland)

Favorite Business Books:

“Good to Great” by Jim Collins;
“Design of Everyday Things” by Donald Norman;
“The Lives of a Cell” by Lewis Thomas

Proudest Moment as an Entrepreneur: “I enjoy the moments of enthusiasm clients feel when they witness their visions and dreams becoming real, and I live for that the excitement that comes with that accomplishment.”



ENERGY

PSC approves
‘Ratepayers
Bill of Rights’

Last week, Mississippi Public Service Commission (PSC) chairman Brandon Presley announced the PSC has approved the first Ratepayers' Bill of Rights, aimed at helping assure consumers of fair treatment by utility companies.

The idea of a Mississippi Ratepayers' Bill of Rights was first crafted and proposed by Presley in Feb. 2009.

The original order was amended by the other commissioners.

“This order doesn't do everything I wanted it to do; but it sure is a good start,” Presley said.

Presley recently received a complaint from a customer in DeSoto County whose electricity was cut off when there was nine-month-old child in the home at the time. This new bill will protect against that scenario, he said.

Customers are protected from having services cut off during extreme heat or cold warnings issued by the National Weather Service and negotiate deferred payment plans, among other provisions.

Central District Commissioner Lynn Posey said the bill “outlines and puts many of the rules we already had in place into a more concise document that is easier to read.”

“Today's vote was a victory for all ratepayers who work hard to meet their financial obligations when paying their utility bills,” said Southern District Commissioner Leonard Bentz.

The bill goes into effect Sept. 4.

Utilities can be fined \$5,000 per day for each day they are in non-compliance with the bill, and those fees cannot be passed through to ratepayers, Presley said.

All three commissioners said they are interested in revisiting the idea of giving customers the option to speak to “a live human being” when they have utility questions.

“All of us want to do it. The challenge is to figure out how to do it and make it affordable for the ratepayer,” Posey said.



Presley