



Happy Accidents

By Mark Merenda

I was at home enjoying a “Sopranos” DVD I had rented. After watching the episode, I scanned the special feature: an interview by film director Peter Bogdonovich, (who plays a small role in the series) with the series’ creator David Chase.

Bogdonovich asked Chase if he had planned certain nuances in the acting and filming of the show. “Not really,” Chase said. “It just kind of happened by accident.”

Bogdonovich went on to relate a conversation he had with famed director John Ford: “Ford told me ‘All the best stuff in movies happens by accident,’” he said. “I later talked to Orson Welles, and I asked him if it was true, and he said yes, absolutely. In fact, he later defined the director as ‘the man who presides over the accidents.’”

Bogdonovich calls it the Theory of the Happy Accident.

THE THEORY OF THE HAPPY ACCIDENT AND YOU

Successful marketing, in my experi-

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ence, works exactly the same way. The best stuff happens by accident. But, such accidents can only occur if you are actively and consistently marketing yourself and your services.

For example, a couple of years ago, a client of mine put on an estate planning seminar. A short while later, he called to complain of dismal results.

“I didn’t get a single new client from the seminar,” he told me. Needless to say, I was horrified.

“Nothing?” I asked. “You didn’t get a single piece of business?”

“Well,” he said, “an *old* client of mine happened to get the invitation and came to the seminar. He’s going to do a couple of things.”

“And how much revenue will these ‘couple of things’ bring to you?” I queried.

“Oh, \$50,000-\$60,000,” he said. “But I’m not really crediting you with that, because he was already my client.”

EXPECTATION DOESN’T ALWAYS EQUAL ACHIEVEMENT

This is the kind of thinking you probably have to overcome regularly within your firm. Educating my client (with whom I still have a wonderful relationship) helped him to understand something: if you don’t achieve exactly what you set out to do, that doesn’t make your effort a failure.

If my client had not been actively marketing — and had not held the seminar — then his old client would not have received a promotion. If his client hadn’t attended the seminar, the firm wouldn’t have realized an extra \$50,000 in revenue.

The fact is, marketing initiatives almost never turn out exactly as intended.

Am I saying two contradictory things? Not at all. Your greatest successes *will* come by accident. But, you can only have these “happy accidents” if you try hard by design.

LUCK — WHEN PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY

“Luck,” said baseball great Branch Rickey, “is the residue of design.” I’m certain that you or your attorneys have had this very experience. You got “lucky” and landed a big client, and were able to trace that luck in one way or another to an effort made, even if it was only the effort required to go to lunch.

How do you balance good planning and hard work vs. happenstance and luck? First, you recognize that luck will rarely — if ever — come looking for you as you sit at your desk doing nothing.

MAKING ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Here’s an analogy: marketing is

like dating. Let's say you're single and you want to find a significant other. Your chances that this special person is simply going to show up and knock on your door are very small indeed, unless you have a thing for delivery people.

Instead, you have to go out and actively look, using the best plan you can come up with. Maybe you'll scour the personal ads in the newspaper or on the Internet. Maybe place your own ad — one that reflects your own interests.

You'll go to places and events (Ski

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club? Dog show? Grocery store? Sports bar?) where you might find people of a similar bent. You'll visit the "hot spots" where other singles gather. You might invest in a new wardrobe or work out more. You'll accept every blind date offer. And, you'll most likely go out several times each week.

And how will you meet the person of your dreams? Probably not in the way you intended. You won't meet them on the Internet or on a blind date. You won't meet them at that party your friend throws. You'll meet

"by accident" behind the counter in the department store while you're shopping for a new shirt to wear to that party.

But you wouldn't have met at all if you weren't going to the party.

GUARANTEES? NO WAY

If you want something to happen, you have to consistently put yourself "out there" where it can happen. Is there any guarantee you will meet the person of your dreams on any given night? No. Is there a guarantee you will meet someone after one month? No. And that's what stops most people. They won't engage in any course of action that doesn't have a guaranteed outcome.

In marketing, as in dating, the expenditure is certain — the result is not. But very few such guarantees exist in life. Almost any action, including a visit to the local convenience store, requires some risk. In business, there is an almost exact correlation between risk and reward. The bigger the reward you seek, the more you must be willing to be bold and daring.

If you wait for a guaranteed return, a foolproof system, a course of action with no risk, you will be waiting a long, long time. And while you wait, life will not. Things in your profession will change. Things in the wider economic markets will change. Those who are out there marketing aggressively will be the first to recognize marketplace changes, to react, and to profit.

MARKETING IS NOT A SCIENCE

One of the maddening things about marketing is that it resists all attempts to reduce it to a science. Like electricity, everyone knows it works, but nobody knows why.

Old marketing joke:

It's common knowledge that 50% of marketing efforts don't work. It's just that nobody knows which 50%.

In filmmaking, dating, and marketing, there is one iron-clad guarantee. If you stay home and hide, you will not find the rewards, whether personal or professional.

To succeed professionally, you must focus relentlessly on revenue

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growth. To hone in on profitability — or worse, costs — is a recipe for paralysis. It never feels good to risk your money.

You must realize (or convince your partners of this): Something more important than money is at risk by doing nothing — your firm's livelihood. If you always do what you always did, then you will always get what you always got — maybe. To achieve new profitability levels, there's no alternative to marketing.

Ever hear the expression, "It's an accident waiting to happen"?

That's the way it is with marketing. It *is* an accident waiting to happen — a happy accident.



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