

SMART MARKETING

“Jesus, don’t let me die a junkie.”

All marketing matters...some just more than most

I’ve always prided myself on being a marketing mercenary. If the product was good and honest, even if it wasn’t popular (or sometimes *because* it wasn’t popular), I would take on the issue or project, promote it, and usually win.

I’ve marketed environmentally safe landfills to communities that have reaped economic as well as ecological benefits. I’ve championed alternative fuels that are 10 times cleaner than coal, yet labeled hazardous. The right to buy and sell fireworks to adults in Florida was almost struck down, and I jumped into that fray. If there was a difficult but honest sell, I was on board.

Marketing products and services, large land deals and entire businesses has brought me to some pretty exciting places. And my firm, with my partners Ed and John Farris, has benefited from these wildly different and exciting projects. Producing TV shows, quarter-million dollar trade show booths, customer research in Scotland...we actually get paid for that!

Locally, we’ve been blessed with some outstanding clients who know our reputation for pushing the limits. They’re wonderful, and we have no clients who we do not consider friends first. It’s just the way we operate. But of all the work we’ve done, in all our years in business, nothing has ever come close to moving me like the work we do for Rescue Mission of the Mahoning Valley.

Recently, we were taping a half-hour documentary about The Mission, which we hope to air on a local television station. I interviewed a couple who moved into The Mission after both had become ill and could no longer work and afford to pay the rent on their meager apartment. They said, “We were one day away from being homeless. We’re both diabetic, but some days we’d get by on one slice of bread each.”

I finished the interview and came downstairs to the main floor of The Mission. There, 80 or so people lined up with their children to get a hot lunch. They had homes...they didn’t live in a cardboard box...most had at

least part-time work. But by the end of the month, there was just not enough left over for food or medicine.

Ashen-faced, I walked out to my overpriced, oversized, gas-guzzling SUV and slunk away like a thief in the night — wondering what is wrong with this world when half of us worry about our golf scores, while a few blocks away the other half are worrying about their next meal.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m very proud that Farris Marketing is so good at selling goods and services. The hundreds of millions of dollars we have helped pump into the economy has I’m sure helped many people keep good jobs and enjoy life more with the products and services we advertise.

But some marketing matters more — like the pro bono work we do for The Rescue Mission. Jeff Mamula, my close friend and employee of many years, interviewed Joey for our documentary. Joey graduated from a very high-end university and could be a professor today. But he became a heroin addict, and spent decades on the street. He recovered through the help of The Rescue Mission, and he has dedicated his life to helping others.

Joey told us his story to help us promote The Mission and the work they do for the homeless, the working poor, the addicted and the victims of domestic violence. His words will help The Mission find these people food, shelter, safety and a second chance. His marketing is TRUTH marketing.

As I sat in the darkened screening room and watched Joey say, “This time, Lord, just let me hang on to you until I die. Jesus, don’t let me die a junkie,” tears streamed down my cheeks. I knew then that all marketing matters — some just more than most.



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