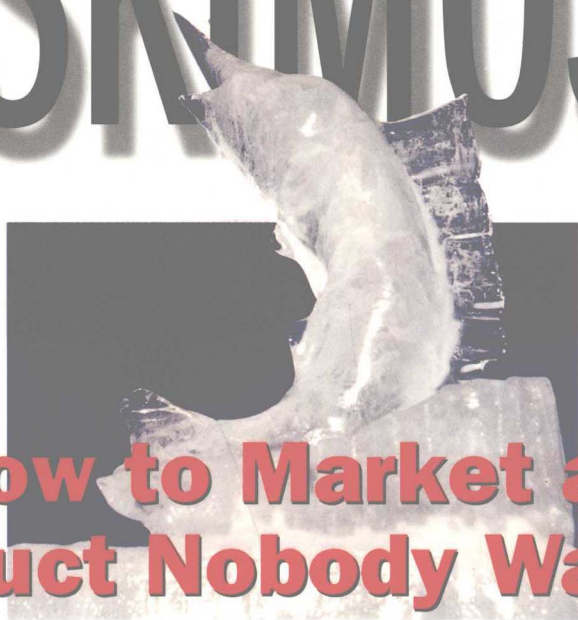


ICE TO THE ESKIMOS



How to Market a Product Nobody Wants

The NBA's top marketer shares his battle-tested secrets to jump-start your sales, excite your customers, and improve your bottom line

JON SPOELSTRA

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**How to Market a
Product Nobody Wants**

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"One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

I thank all the people who allowed me to think impossible things. It all started, of course, with my mother and father. Then my wife, Lisa. My kids, Monica and Erik, made their contributions. Along the way was Larry Weinberg. He used to own the Portland Trail Blazers. He not only wanted me to think impossible things, he would take off his jacket and wave me on.

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1. JUMP-STARTING OUT OF HELL

Ground rule #1: You've got to want to clip on the wires and turn up the juice.

I've spent almost twenty years as an executive for teams in the NBA. Of the four teams that I have worked for, I've seen over 250 players come and go. But the most charismatic player I've ever been associated with is a player you probably have never heard of:

Billy Ray Bates.

Billy Ray joined the Portland Trail Blazers about halfway through the 1981-82 season. He was a 6'4", 200-pound shooting guard who had toiled in minor league basketball for a couple of seasons. Once he got the chance with us, he exhibited dunks that only a Dr. J or a Michael Jordan could even think about. And he shot the three-pointer like a Larry Bird. One season, he hoisted the Blazer team onto his shoulders and lugged them to a playoff birth. Then he averaged 27 points a game in the playoffs. The Portland crowd loved Billy Ray more than any other player I have ever seen, including Clyde Drexler.

Billy Ray's education was spotty at best. But he sure could

come up with some great one-liners. For instance, once when Billy Ray was being interviewed on our postgame radio show by Bill Schonely, the voice of the Blazers, Schonely asked him about his time in the CBA, basketball's minor league. Billy Ray said, "The CBA is a great street corner, but you can't hang around there for the rest of your life."

There are hundreds of other one-line responses by Billy Ray that we heard over the two and a half years he played for us. The best was when he was in the office one summer visiting Stu Inman, the Blazers director of player personnel. After the meeting, Billy Ray walked down the long hallway where our offices were. Stu called to him, "Billy, Billy Ray."

Billy Ray stopped right in front of my door. I looked up.

Stu yelled, "Did you see where Kentucky State [where Billy Ray starred in college] is dropping basketball?"

Without even a blink or a quick head fake, Billy Ray said, "Aw, shucks, now I won't have nothing to remember."

It sounded like Billy was referring to Communist Russia. You know, fall out of power and your name gets removed from the history books.

In reading this book, I think you'll have plenty to remember and implement. If you implement *just one* of the jump-start marketing principles, you'll be way ahead. If you implement a lot of the principles, you could even market ice to the Eskimos.

At the beginning of each chapter, I tell a little anecdote from my experiences in the NBA. Sometimes the anecdote is related to the chapter; sometimes it isn't. The anecdote is just an easy way to get into the chapter. If you need a small break from reading about the jump-start marketing principles in *Ice to the Eskimos*, skip ahead and read the anecdotes.



The principles of jump-start marketing began for me with a phone call at about 11:00 P.M. on a Sunday between Christmas and New Year's in 1991.

"This is Alan Aufzien," the caller said. "I'm the chairman of the New Jersey Nets."

Normally, you would answer, "Yes?" or something like that. Instead, I experienced one of those phenomenal thought processes where somehow we can think of a whole slew of things in just a *nanosecond*. In that nanosecond before I answered the chairman, I thought I was being set up by some students. You see, I had been teaching sports marketing at the University of Portland. To make a point on how *not* to do something, I always referred to the New Jersey Nets. For as long as I could remember, they had been the laughingstock of the NBA—both on and off the basketball court. To add some sick humor to the class, I would make some awful comment about their penchant for acquiring players who had problems with drugs. I would say, "The only thing that the Nets have led the league in were drug rehab cases." Sometimes I would add, "If the Nets couldn't draft another drug addict, they would trade for one. If that didn't work, they would sign one as a free agent."

When Alan identified himself, I immediately thought that some students had dreamed up a practical joke and got an adult to call and accuse me of always picking on the Nets. The tip-off was the time of day. At 11:00 P.M. in Portland, it was 2:00 A.M. in New Jersey. On a *Sunday* night. Little did I know at the time that the Nets would keep you up on any night of the week.

In that rush of thinking in that nanosecond, I had a perfect rejoinder to the students' practical joke on me. "What do you need, a new drug connection for your players?" As I started to say those words, I caught myself. I chickened out. I said, "Yes?"

As you would figure, it wasn't a practical joke. It was really the chairman of the Nets, and I didn't make a fool of myself.

"We would like for you to come and talk to us about some consulting," Alan said.

"I'm not interested," I said. After eleven years as senior VP/general manager with the Portland Trail Blazers (where I resigned) and then ninety days as president/GM of the Denver Nuggets (where I was fired), I was enjoying my career as an adjunct professor. You would, too. Think of the life I was leading.

Twice a week, I would go to the campus about noon. I would have lunch with some students. I would teach my class from 1:00 to 2:20. I would walk over to the student center and have a cup of coffee. After coffee, I would walk over to the basketball arena on campus and watch practice. After an hour or so, I would come home. My wife would ask, "Well, how was your day?" "Tough," I would say. "Really tough."

On days that I didn't teach, we would drive an hour and fifteen minutes to our beach house on the Oregon coast. *Really, really* tough.

"If you don't want to consult, could you at least come into New York for dinner with us and give us some advice?" Alan asked. "We'll pay all of your expenses, and a fee, of course. What would your fee be?"

I didn't want to go to New York to have dinner. The seven owners of the New Jersey Nets had a reputation for being cheap bastards, so I gave him an outrageous fee, plus first-class expenses to fly into New York to have dinner. I knew they wouldn't accept.

He said, "Okay, how about Wednesday night?"

The rest is history. Without that dinner, however, and the subsequent four and a half years marketing the Nets (2 years as a consultant, 2.5 years as president/chief operating officer),

I would never have really got to the true essence of jump-start marketing. I would have been just like any other marketing executive who did a decent job marketing a decent product. I had never before been so flat-out challenged as I was in marketing the Nets. I don't think any marketing executive in the history of the world has been so challenged. But without this huge challenge, I wouldn't have come to depend on the jump-start marketing techniques that I think are applicable to any product or any company in any field.

DO YOU NEED TO BE A FAN?

I use many examples from the world of marketing a sports team to illustrate my principles of jump-start marketing. Does this mean you have to be a sports fan to appreciate these marketing principles? Of course not. Don't mistake this book as a *sports marketing* book. After reading this book, you won't be able to run away and join a pro sports team. What you will be able to do is take the ideas and principles of jump-start marketing and quickly adapt them to your particular field.

If you are indeed a sports fan, I think you'll agree that the examples in this book are more fun to read—and the ideas can be more adaptable—than if I were writing about how to market steel or fertilizer, or sweat socks.

ARE THERE EASIER WAYS TO JUMP-START A COMPANY?

When you read the newspapers, it seems that others have found easier ways to jump-start a company. After all, almost daily you can read about a company laying off hundreds or even thousands of employees. In the short term, that probably

works. The balance sheet will certainly look better. But this savings is just delaying what really needs to be done—to *jump-start the company through marketing*. With jump-start marketing, those employees might not need to be laid off in the first place.

Keeping employees also helps other companies. After all, employees are customers, too. When employees—or *customers*—get laid off, they usually “lay off” their spending. So when you read about a company laying off thousands of employees, you can say, “Thanks, pal, you just eliminated part of my market.” It would be much better for us all if companies used jump-start marketing techniques to boost sales and profits.

So, with jump-start marketing you can help your company, your employees, other companies, our country, other countries, and the world. Now, why wouldn’t you plug in and use some of these strategies and techniques and jump-start your company?

A Simple Test You Can Take

To assist you in adapting these principles to your company, I give you a little test at the end of each chapter. You don’t send in your answers for a grade. Just take the test and let the ideas flow.

It’s an open-book test, meaning that you can look back to the pages of each chapter for some of the answers. Some of the other answers aren’t in the book; they are with you. These answers involve taking the principles of jump-start marketing and applying them to your particular business.

This first little test is the easiest. It has only one question to answer. And it’s multiple choice, no less. However, if you don’t pass this easy little test of one question, you should close the

book, find the receipt, and see if you can return it to the bookstore where you bought it.

(Multiple choice.) I want to:

- A. Help jump-start the company I work for.**
- B. Help our employees perform better.**
- C. Help jump-start the national economy.**
- D. Help jump-start the world economy.**
- E. All of the above.**
- F. None of the above.**
- G. Use this information to help *downsize* my company.**

Answers

If you answered (E), you did terrific! Write 150 percent (that's on a scale of 100 percent). Take a look at that 150 percent; that's your grade! Better than the grade, you'll enjoy this book and be able to apply a lot of the principles of jump-start marketing. When you apply these principles, you'll see that they work, that your company experiences some important growth. You'll be a hero, and your employees will think of you as a saint.

If you answered (A) or (B), give yourself 120 percent. Not bad, eh? You see, if all you want to do is help jump-start the company you work for or help your employees perform better, you will accomplish both by using the principles of jump-start marketing. You'll also accomplish (C) and (D). You didn't get 150 percent because you didn't have the altruistic goals of (C) and (D).

If you answered (C) or (D), grade yourself 70 percent. You passed! However, be aware that you may be a little too altruis-

tic. Altruism starts at home—in this case your company. If you jump-start your company and thousands upon thousands of others jump-start their companies, then (C) and (D) will naturally take care of themselves.

Flunking This Little Test?

If you answered (F), I don't quite understand your motivation for even reading this far, so your grade is *incomplete*. If you continue reading to the last page, then I recommend that you take this test again.

Lastly, if you answered (G), turn in your test and walk out the door. You must be a financial type that will be trying to learn the principles of jump-start marketing so that you can be a little knowledgeable when you try to kill company growth. Well, reading this book won't work for you. The book will just confirm your belief that all marketing people are crazy.

2. ULYSSES, YOU, AND ME

Ground rule #2: Don't fool yourself into thinking you're somebody else.

My son played professional basketball in Germany for a couple of years. Somewhere along the line, he and I sat down and he told me what he wanted to do for a living.

He took my course while I was an adjunct professor, so I knew he was bright and had a good work ethic. But, he told me, "Dad, I want to be a coach."

I sat and stared at him for a while.

"You know, Erik," I said, "if you came and told me that you had a drug habit, we would send you to rehab. If you told me that you were an alcoholic, we would get you dried out. But if you want to be a coach, there is nothing we can do for you."

Coaches are the craziest people I have ever met. When they win a game, they can't enjoy it, because they know they're going to lose the next one. When they lose a game, they think they might not ever win another one. In fact, one day Dream Team coach Chuck Daly came into my office when we were both with the Nets. The Nets had lost two straight games. Chuck said, "We might not win another game this season."

“Chuck, there’s sixty games left! We’re 8–14 right now. You think we’re going to lose sixty straight and finish 8–74?”

“It could happen the way we’re playing,” Chuck said. “It could happen.”

It didn’t happen. We went on to win thirty-four games and lose twenty-six.

Regardless of what crazy future faces my son as a coach, at least he knows what he wants to do. He knows what he is, he knows where he is going. I find that the main problem for companies that have trouble marketing themselves is knowing who they are and what their market really is. If you think you know who you are and what your market really is, after reading this chapter you might see different pixels that change the whole image.



Most of us never get the chance to market the *best* product in the *best* market with the *biggest* advertising budget and the *biggest* market share. In fact, most of the time our products have warts and pimples in all the wrong places. Our job is, of course, to successfully market these products—warts, pimples, and all. I’ve had more than my share of these types of products, and the first thing I do in marketing such a product is to think of Ulysses.

ULYSSES, YOU AND ME

I can best explain how I use Ulysses by bringing you right into the middle of how we decided to market a woeful product—the New Jersey Nets. In fact, in this chapter I’m going to make you an *owner* of the Nets. As an owner of the Nets, you’ll vividly see how I used Ulysses—and how you can use Ulysses—in marketing other less-than-the-best products.

As an owner of the New Jersey Nets, picture this. You’re sit-