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# GUERRILLA MARKETING IN LOUISVILLE

You’ll know it when you see it

By: Doug Stern  
Illustration: Mary Yates

Maybe you remember the scene from *Fight Club*, the 1999 cult classic, when Jack (Ed Norton) explains how Tyler (Brad Pitt) “...gave the rules that he and I decided.”

The first rule of fight club is -- you don’t talk about fight club. The second rule of fight club is -- you don’t talk about fight club.

There are two kinds of people who deal with guerrilla marketing. The ones who’ll talk about it, and the ones who won’t.

The ones who won’t ask, if you talk about it, are you really doing it? They’re the guerrilla marketers who live and die in the hit-and-run, surprise-attack world that the phrase implies. (They’re the ones who’ve made it harder for me to write this article.)

Jay Conrad Levinson, on the other hand, is a talker. He’s the guy who claims to have invented (and trademarked) guerrilla marketing. It’s the name for the kind of awareness-building, it’s-all-about-you tactics that put a premium on wits and stealth more than on big budgets and conventional use of mainstream media.

That was back in 1983, when he first published *Guerrilla Marketing: Secrets for Making Big Profits from Your Small Business*. Four editions, 24 years and over 1 million copies ago.

Some insist that Levinson revolutionized sales and marketing.

## P.T. BARNUM, REINCARNATED

Revolutions aside, Levinson invented an industry for himself. He has written or co-authored at least 32 books and various CDs and DVDs—all for sale in his “Guerrilla

Marketing Store.”

Plus, he’s had a hand (as far as most mortals can tell) in creating the Guerrilla Marketing Association, Guerrilla Marketing for the New Millennium (it’s online) and the Certified Guerrilla Marketing Coaches program.

## BUILDING A BETTER MOUSETRAP

It’s no wonder. Nobody has to tell you what a cluttered, complicated and contradictory world is out there. How technology has been such a blessing and a curse.

It’s not surprising that someone with a smart and effective way to reach increasingly overwhelmed buyers could develop a devoted and growing following.

Even word-of-mouth marketing—a seemingly narrow slice of GM—has struck a huge chord. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association was created in 2004 and already has about 400 corporate members worldwide, both big (YUM! Brands, Microsoft and Yahoo) and small (Brains on Fire and a bunch of other cool and quirky shops).

## DRANK THE KOOL-AID

Debbie Newhouse is one of these true believers...and, apparently, Louisville’s only certified guerrilla marketing coach. In fact, this co-managing partner of Rev Up Now LLC ([www.revupnow.com](http://www.revupnow.com)) says that she has practiced guerrilla marketing ever since she was getting her start in sales about 20 years ago.

That was even before she heard the term. Newhouse was working in the power tool and accessories industry back in her native Portland, Ore. She says that she had a mentor who got it.



Her boss understood that sales was about removing barriers—a cornerstone of GM. As a result, Newhouse developed a nose for ways to get a product in front of the right supplier or customer (“...innovative and open-minded”).

**SMELLS LIKE PIZZA**

Newhouse likes to talk about a client of hers in Cincinnati, a tile flooring company. She engineered a campaign where targeted businesses were delivered a large pepperoni and a second box of flooring samples—sliced (you guessed it) like pizza and bearing the tag, “no matter how you slice it...” She says that her tile client reports that they’re still hearing the buzz seven years later.

“It’s a lot of work,” Newhouse said, echoing one of Levinson’s mantras. “Start with solid research, test, measure and, above all else, be patient.”

**DON’T TRY THIS AT HOME**

Bigger Louisville-area agencies are on the guerrilla bandwagon, too. Red7e, for example, used GM tactics to promote the recent Idea Festival. (The agency’s client, Geek Squad, was a top corporate underwriter.)

AD Jeremy Reiss said Red7e uploaded three 00:15 promo spots to YouTube, produced quickly and on a low-low budget. The video looks like it once ran on *Jackass: The Movie*. Then they added some supers and were off to the races, with each clip getting hundreds of views.

The agency topped it off with the right, tied-in swag: pocket protectors, T-shirts, napkins and coffee cups imprinted with the Idea Festival and Geek Squad logos.

**BEANED IN BOSTON**

There is, however, an ethical tightrope. Most people have heard, for example, of the poopstorm Turner Broadcasting System stirred up in January in Boston.

That’s where TBS hit a homeland security nerve by using a GM tactic to goose viewership of the Cartoon Network. Turner was promoting Adult Swim’s animated television show “Aqua Teen

public transit and suffering total economic gridlock. TBS ended up forking over \$2 million, half to compensate the authorities and half to buy some goodwill.

**LESSONS FROM LOSSES**

Some cynics wonder whether TBS played us. After all, the coverage of the hoax boosted the number of Adult Swim viewers far more effectively than what \$2 million would have achieved if spent conventionally.

Others disagree, saying that TBS gave GM a costly, perhaps long-term, black eye. Newhouse says that Boston was a reminder that one size does

**IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT SOMEONE WITH A SMART AND EFFECTIVE WAY TO REACH INCREASINGLY OVERWHELMED BUYERS COULD DEVELOP A DEVOTED AND GROWING FOLLOWING.**

Hunger Force” in Boston and nine other cities. The *Boston Globe* described the ploy this way:

The objects that had been placed on bridges and other infrastructure across the city are patterns of lighted dots in the shape of boxy characters on the cartoon show. The flashing lights are on black rectangles a little larger than laptops.

Bostonians saw the cryptic-looking boxes, thought WMD’s and had a cow, shutting down

not fit all. GM preaches, as she put it, “...the importance of diversity and the need to consider local conditions” when planning a campaign.

It’s also a reminder that GM—just like fight club—keeps getting bigger. Whether you talk about it or not.

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