

Friday, May 12, 2006

### **When marketing crosses over into deceit**

Today, for the second time my bookkeeper put something on my desk that gave me pause. She is usually pretty good at weeding out ads and solicitations and filing them into the paper shredder, but a couple weeks ago, and again today she put a plain white envelope on my desk, my name and address had been typed off of what appeared to be a typewriter. No return address.

Inside is what at first glance appears to be a single page, ripped out of a magazine, with an article about executive planning or in today's case, public speaking.

An ordinary post-it note is affixed in the upper right corner:

Mark, Try this.

It works!

-J

The first time this happened, I was perplexed. What is this and where did it come from? The original article was about how busy execs can balance career and family and as a new dad, this appealed to me. How considerate my anonymous friend was!

Who to thank? I emailed to the two people I know who's first initial is "J" asking them if they took the trouble to cut an article out of a magazine and postal mail it to me.

They both promptly emailed back, making the same wisecracks about "early onset Alzheimers" but to their knowledge, neither of them knew what the hell I was talking about.

So I looked closer, going so far as to pull an old file out of the cabinet and comparing the handwriting on the post-it to that of a former colleague here who's name also begins with "J". No match.

Back to the article, finally I see it, the word "advertisement" captioned at the top of the article. The coupon for "Executive Focus" that just happened to be on the back page was not so co-incidental. The copyright notice was "© 2006 Personalized Promotion by Briefings Publishing Group".

This was an elaborate ruse.

At first I was impressed. This marketing effort not only had me seriously considering subscribing to their magazine (because as a new dad, I am very much interested in time management and lifestyle balance issues) but even had me email two friends talking about it!

That seemed impressive until it dawned on me that the "success" of the campaign rested on the fact that I had been deceived. Fooled into believing somebody who knew me personally took the trouble to mail me this "article" (hindsight: most of my friends would just shoot me the URL via IM or email, come to think of it, the only person who postal mails me hard copy are the newspaper clippings my mother sends me), they hoped to trick me into subscribing to their product. In short, the whole thing was a clever, unique con job. Not a good way to try to start a business relationship with me.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in The Sleazemeter at 15:44