

God stuff

Souls market needs better ad campaign



STEVE CULLEN is a junior advertising major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Author's note: I refer to God as the archetypal figure of spiritual goodness. I, in no way, support any organized religion. My intent is satire.

God needs a marketing director. If there is a business that is fierce in competition, and has a strong need for solid market positioning, it's the business of saving souls. I don't know how God is doing in the rest of the cosmos, but in the earth market, She has only about a 5 percent share lead.

As an advertising major with some marketing background, I feel I can do better than that for God. With a strong strategic plan and out-of-this-world advertising, I could easily have God dominate the human-souls marketplace. I've sent in my résumé, but like any governing body, there's a load of red tape. It has to go through the interstellar commission, the purgatory review board, Bill Gates and finally: God.

It's a pretty simple concept that I propose, all based on solid marketing principals. When executed, the results will be the "salvation" of humanity and peace in our little niche of the universe.

Looking at the playing field, the Earth market is super high in demand for a "salvation"-type product. Not to mention a bunch of service-related goods: fairness, serenity, humanity, kindness, and while we're at it, bliss.

Earth is an open market for consumable goods as well, like food, clean air, good water, trees, et cetera. Now looking over God's business record, after the universe thing, cleaning up this market should be no problem at all.

So why are we in shambles? Why is it God Inc. can't get its goods into the marketplace? The answers lie in the firm's management, product planning and communications.

Internal management holds the first flaws; God has got to get everybody on the same page. There's about 600 branches of the firm, each subject to so many mergers and acquisitions there's no company loyalty anymore. How can employees help business goals when they're killing fellow members?

How about that legal division? Someone needs to put the smack down on all of these cult pseudo-religious freaks. They're spoiling company image, going around damning everybody, picking on the weak, and using the firm's logo haphazardly. Sue, tax and fine.

Now, the nitty gritty. First, the pricing issue is too ambiguous. Consumers don't know at what price "salvation" comes. Do consumers have to live in a temple devoid of outside corruption? Or is it as simple as doing good for Mother Earth and fellow dwellers? The price must be attainable as not to out price consumers. When the firm knows the value of salvation, then the people who purchase it can come to an agreement on its value.

Maybe it's the deal of the millennium. I say we make it paid for in life's total goodness, to self and world, with intent of total well-being for self and others.

How about the distribution? Where do you

get the product? At a place of worship, in your home, in your heart? Do you have to visit a certain place, be born of a certain ethnicity, or can you marry into it? It's got to be attainable to all persons; so let's say we consolidate the churches, mosques and temples and set fires into general

purchase locations of goodness. Just show up with a desire to obtain the product, and the willingness to pay the price. Hassle-free, low-pressure and fast to respond.

Looking at personal selling, I've got some work here. This tool really has a bad rap. Our own campus has seen the strife caused by the damning fire-and-brimstone pseudo-preachers polluting our late summer air.

So I would change that. I use public relations staffs. They are informative, but not overbearing; helpful but not persuasive. They may only provide guidance in obtaining, paying for and using the product. They do not sell.

As for the product, let's see. So what is it the consumer gets when using God Inc. products? Considering the branches will be more unified by now, we can really hone down the benefits because people buy benefits, not products.

Right now the position of the product is too fragmented and too specific. Consumers are being sold heaven, Allah, nirvana, enlightenment, or even avoidance of hell, Sifron, or whatever. God's firm has lost focus on the benefits it sells. By selling features, the firm forgot the benefit: enrichment - of self, planet, others.

God's firm isn't dominating because it has been pushing and producing the wrong benefits. Religion has promoted subservience, penance, hedonism, righteousness, but not what people are willing to buy. Pushing features neglects the consumer. Consumers of today won't stand for the cookie-cutter approach to "salvation goods." It's too personal a purchase for that. In fact, I hope readers can see how much of the marketing process depends on the consumer.

I guess that's why I think God needs a marketing director. Religions of the world have lost sight of the consumer.

I hope God hires a marketing director to help Her focus more tightly on the consumers She should be benefiting. The great firms that play a role in our market should realize the consumer is being left behind, along with all the benefits it should provide for us.

Religion needs to modernize, and it needs to worry less about God and more about the benefits for the consumer. I will never buy in to God. I only buy peace and enrichment.

Everyone has right to select own religion



CLIFF HICKS is a junior news-editorial and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

It's 4:30 on a Saturday afternoon. A young man is sitting in a quiet, little, used bookstore, thumbing through a copy of a Tom Stoppard play when a woman in her mid-30s walks into the shop. It is not the woman so much as her shirt that catches his eye.

It reads: "I Had Fallen, But I Got Back Up! Thank You, Jesus!" She catches the young man reading her shirt, and she smiles at him benevolently. "Have you found Jesus, young man?"

He pauses, rubbing his freshly clean-shaven chin. "That's a good question, ma'am," he says, stifling back an urge to ask if Jesus had been lost. "May I ask what your shirt means when it says, 'I Had Fallen?'"

"Well, I went through a troublesome time in my life about 8 years back. I was married to an abusive husband, I was on drugs, and my life was generally in shambles. I found Jesus, and He helped me fix all those things," she tells him, her eyes focused on him intently.

There is a long pause in the conversation where the young man considers this. "Ma'am, I don't mean to sound like a member of the Inquisition - but why?"

"What do you mean, why?" the woman responds, looking a little off-guard.

"You had fallen because of your own weakness, but why does God allow that?"

"Young man, are you an atheist?" A sly grin crosses the young man's face, knowing there's no running from the argument now. "No, ma'am. I believe there is a God with all my heart. He and I have an understanding. I'm more of a soul-searcher, perhaps, or maybe just someone who's lost his way."

"You should come to one of our services. A lot of people like yourself come into our church."

He laughs softly, folding his arms over his chest. "You won't find me in a House of God," he says, his face weary beyond his years.

She looks at him with concern, her eyes full of sorrow for him. "May I ask why not, young man?"

The young man sighs quietly, his shoulders shrugging slightly. "Because God isn't in them, I suppose."

There is a sudden gasp of air, the woman's face taking on a look of utter shock. "How could you say such a thing?"

"Because I believe in it," the young man says, leaning against the bookshelf. "More problems in this world arise from organized religion than from almost anything else. The Inquisition, the Crusades, the constant warring in the Middle East, persecution. I personally don't see what organized religion has to offer me."

She considers her words carefully before speaking them. "Such words might be considered blasphemous by some. Organized religion offers you a place to find guidance from those more knowledgeable than you."

A throaty chuckle escapes his lips. "More knowledgeable than me. Isn't that a little bit assuming of you? How can anyone really know anything about religion? It's all based on faith. Despite all the texts that have been written on the subject, how can I have faith in them over myself?"

She lowers her head sadly before looking up at him. "Then you don't believe in the

Resurrection of Our Savior, Jesus Christ?"

"Now don't be putting words in my mouth. I haven't made up my mind on the carpenter's son."

"Haven't made up your mind? Young man, you are in a very precarious situation."

"That's what they tell me. Me personally, I think God wants me to take my time in the whole matter. My religion is between him and me. See, there are a lot of paradoxes that make me question the whole 'Son-of-God' bit. God says I will not prove myself to man, then brings Jesus into play. I just don't know. A lot of his teachings seem very wise, but I haven't decided to myself whether or not I'm going to accept the whole virgin birth and whatnot. Sooner or later, it'll all be clear to me, but there's nothing you or anyone else can do about it."

She sighs to herself softly, having done all she can for this spiritual wanderer. "I fear for your soul, young man."

"Don't fear for it too long, ma'am. Either I'm already irrevocably going to hell, or God sees things my way. I'm more inclined to believe the latter. I'd like to think that whoever made me can forgive me for the faults they already knew were there."

"You don't get along with anyone of religion, do you?" she asks him.

"On the contrary, I respect everyone's right to go his own way. Of my two ex-girlfriends, one was Catholic and the other was a Jehovah's Witness. The people I care about, the people I love - I don't ask what religion they are. It eventually comes up, but it doesn't hold any value. It's as important as their height - it isn't."

The woman thinks about this for a moment. "If you have friends, of all these different religions, why don't you decide which one is right for you and join it?"

"Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims and the rest - they all have valid points, but I can't accept any single one of them as the religion for me. That's why I don't think there should be organized religion because everyone has his own religion."

"That's a very interesting concept, young man, but I'm not sure I can accept it."

With a sudden jerk of his fingers, he zips up his leather jacket, a smirk on his lips. "I'm not asking you to accept it. I wasn't the one who started this conversation and I've never had the goal of converting you to my cause. Your life, your religion, your business."

He hands the script to the clerk, taking a fiver out of his leather wallet with a sigh, giving it to her. He turns back to the woman as the clerk counts out the change. "To each his own, ma'am. My God and I don't have any problems with each other, and that's all that really matters."

If the woman says anything as he walks out of the door, he can't hear it. He's fairly certain she wasn't listening anyway. As he slips into the crowd, making his way back to his truck, he thinks to himself "Too many religious discussions involve too much talking and not enough listening."