

TURN TO NETWORK: THE ESSENTIAL NEW MARKETING CAREERS RESOURCE, PAGE 51

# Marketing

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## DIRECT HIT

M & C Saatchi's Andy Pontin,  
Direct Marketer of the Year



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Malcolm Auld is a Telstra customer, shareholder, victim and occasional fan. He's also a marketing author, educator and principal of MAD – an advertising agency. Contact Malcolm on (02) 9976 0900 or email Malcolm@madmail.com.au.

**Malcolm Auld** concludes his two-part article on the damaging consequences to a brand when the promises of broadcast advertising and the customer experience are two different things.

## Hangin' on the telephone... still

**D**espite a litany of problems as a Telstra broadband customer – and because I'd missed the first Telstra float – I decided to go big time on the Telstra II float. Damn!

So to qualify for a bundled discount and to continue to do my bit for the share price, I decided to transfer my mobile to Telstra from the African telephone company. The sales assistant asked me if I would like the bill sent to my Melbourne address – this was in a store in Brookvale, in Sydney, just after we had discussed me living in the next suburb. When I asked what Melbourne address he was referring to, he showed me the list of my addresses on the database – and the one at the top was a Melbourne address I hadn't used for about eight years. I wasn't aware my account details going back almost a decade were sitting on a file like this – when I asked if he could delete it, he said he wasn't authorised. I'd better check the Telstra Privacy Policy and see what options I have to correct the data myself.

As you know there have been some very serious problems with the Telstra email service lately, with customers' businesses being badly

affected and many considering civil legal action. It certainly had an impact upon one of my businesses and we're still doing an audit to determine what business may have been lost thanks to the email system that didn't work. I've had to establish a new email service for my business with another supplier.

On a personal level, a friend of mine sent an email about the sad death of his father and the details of the funeral, but unfortunately the email didn't arrive, or if it did, it arrived late and many friends didn't get to the funeral.

Once again last week, the system was broken. My wife runs part of our business from a home office, via the ADSL service and again the internet service wasn't working. When she rang Telstra to find out

why not, she passed the security formalities of identifying herself and they were very accommodating in trying to resolve the problem.

The service technician explained there was a problem in Victoria, but it was possible it may have slipped into New South Wales in a few areas. He directed my wife to run a software program from within the hard drive but this didn't fix things, so he suggested she try to log on again in an hour. She tried again later, but this time there was a different error message – Telstra didn't recognise the stored password. My wife keyed the password in manually, but it still didn't work. When she rang Telstra again, she wasn't allowed to get the problem solved because she wasn't registered as the user; despite the fact Telstra had

helped her with the earlier error problem during the day. Apparently she is only registered as a user on some of our telephone lines, but not the internet line – the things you learn, hey? Consequently she was unable to get any work done for the day.

So the next day, Saturday, I opened the email system and it worked perfectly – the marvels of technology. But I had a notice from Telstra that we had exceeded our 100 percent usage allocation for the month. This seemed strange, given how poorly the service had been operating for most of the month, so I checked the usage meter. It indicated that the previous day, when we couldn't use the system, we had apparently downloaded over 100 megabytes of data in a

**IF YOU AREN'T A TELSTRA CUSTOMER YOU CAN GET TWO MONTHS FREE SERVICE WHEN YOU BECOME A CUSTOMER. YET WE POOR CUSTOMERS WHO ARE FUNDING THE ADVERTISING OF THESE MESSAGES, ONLY GET TWO WEEKS FREE SERVICE AS COMPENSATION FOR A SYSTEM THAT HASN'T BEEN WORKING.**

# WHY IS IT THAT WHENEVER YOU CALL THE SERVICE DEPARTMENT, YOU GET A RECORDED MESSAGE ADVISING THAT THEY ARE RECEIVING MORE THAN NORMAL TELEPHONE ENQUIRIES, SO THERE COULD BE SIGNIFICANT DELAYS. DON'T THEY UNDERSTAND THAT MAYBE 'MORE THAN THE NORMAL' IS IN FACT 'THE NORMAL'?

two-hour period – something we wouldn't normally do in a week.

So I rang Telstra for an explanation. Why is it that whenever you call the service department, you get a recorded message advising that they are receiving more than normal telephone enquiries, so there could be significant delays – call back later. Don't they understand that maybe 'more than the normal' is in fact 'the normal'? Hire more people to provide the service – there's certainly enough profit to draw from.

Eventually when I spoke to a technical person, he agreed it was quite strange but couldn't work out what had caused it. After a con-

versation with a colleague in the billing department, he asked if he could transfer me to the colleague to resolve the issue. I agreed that would be a good idea and he transferred me to the recorded voice system, where I had to select the billing service. When I finally spoke to a human I had to explain the whole problem over again and go through the security tests, name, date of birth, etc., even though I had already done that with the technician. After explaining the problem, the billing person advised he wasn't authorised to credit my account to correct the situation. I had to wait until I received my invoice at the end of the month and then call Telstra and negotiate the

credit with someone else in the billing department. He was going to put a note on my account for the record. So now I have to waste my time calling an answer machine and waiting in line to talk to someone at Telstra to get them to credit me for their problem. Short-paying the invoice and sending a covering letter wasn't permissible, as I'd probably be sued. Life wasn't meant to be easy, but it wasn't meant to be this difficult either!

What's most irritating about being a Telstra customer is the paid messages Telstra is making about the broadband service being used by around 1.5 million customers. Right now, if you aren't a Telstra customer you can get two months free service

when you become a customer. Yet we poor customers who are funding the advertising of these messages, only get two weeks free service as compensation for a system that hasn't been working. The body language of the ads doesn't match the service being provided.

And just in case I didn't see any of the ads they're running in the mass media, my shareholders funds paid for two identical mailings with the special two month offer addressed "To the resident" at my home address. I'm already a customer, but Telstra hadn't even bothered to differentiate between customers and prospects when mailing the offer and have wasted even more money damaging their brand.

As we all know, you are not in business to make money – you are in business to make and keep customers (profitably). You cannot make a profit without first having customers. If you can, I'd like to work with you. Maybe if Telstra invested more in talking with their customers, rather than advertising to prospects, the business might grow more profitably. Certainly the pleasant surprise of receiving a phone call from a person at the phone company would get people talking – in a positive way. ■