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Today's High-Profile Liars Kill Credibility, Hurt Response

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If “Bonfire of the Vanities” symbolized the go-go 1980s and 1990s, the film that I think typifies today’s culture is “Liar Liar.”

Why do I say that? Because within a short time period, these major stories of deceit and deception all made national news headlines:

- A prospective owner of the Minnesota Vikings football team is caught lying on his biography. He claims he played in the Little League World Series and for the Cincinnati Bengals. Neither is true.
- The medical adviser for Major League Baseball, who testifies about steroids before Congress, says he has a medical degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He doesn’t. He attended medical school in Mexico.
- New York Times’ reporter Jayson Blair is caught fabricating stories, making up scenes and filing stories from various states without ever leaving New York.

But the lying doesn’t stop there ...

- New Republic reporter Stephen Glass makes up interview notes, Web sites, even business cards to deceive his editors.
- Historian Joseph Ellis, who teaches a college course on Vietnam, lies about serving in the military there.
- Notre Dame football coach George O’Leary quits just five days after being hired when caught lying about his academic and athletic



backgrounds. “I’ve always been big on trust,” he tells reporters days before.

- And business leaders from Tyco, Enron, MCI and AIG are hauled into court involving deceptive business practices.

Incredibly, Kenneth Rice, the former CEO of Enron Broadband Services, tells jurors at his fraud and conspiracy trial: “We chose to lie about the capabilities of the network so that would take away the credibility issue.”

The bottom line? This culture of lying and dishonesty makes our job of generating a direct response much more difficult.

As I learned early in my career in both outside and inside sales, credibility is an essential part of the sales process. Without credibility, there is no trust ... no response ... and no sale.

We marketers need to be able to answer the question posed by a crusty prospect in the now-famous McGraw-Hill Magazine ad from 1958:

“I don’t know who you are,

I don’t know your company,

I don’t know what your company stands for,

I don’t know your company’s customers,

I don’t know your company’s record,

I don’t know your company’s reputation.

What was it you wanted to sell me?”

Fortunately, there are many ways we can enhance credibility -- or promote what Merriam-Webster defines as “the quality or power of inspiring belief.”

You can build trust and credibility with all these tools:

- Strong guarantees of satisfaction.
- Lists of important companies or customers who use your service.
- Third-party endorsements.
- Testimonials from clients.

- Dramatic case studies.
- Powerful demonstrations of your unique selling proposition.
- Industry awards and recognition.
- White papers by recognized authorities discussing your company's products or services.
- Key statistics.
- Favorable news articles.
- Celebrity endorsers.

If you aren't using these credibility-boosters to move prospects from distrust to trust, from skepticism to belief, you're probably leaving responses -- and valuable revenue -- on the table.

Employ them and you'll not only magnify your response, you'll increase the likelihood that the film symbolizing your business success is "It's a Wonderful Life."

Jim Murphy is president of his own direct marketing copywriting and consulting firm. Earlier, he was a longtime creative director at Devon Direct. For information about his new presentation on "The Missing Link in Today's Marketing," e-mail him at murfman1@comcast.net.



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