

Honorable Influence: A Christian's Guide to Faithful Marketing

David Hagenbuch
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One day a colleague of mine caught me after teaching a session of his ethics course. He pulled me aside and told me that no one in his class, including himself, could imagine an ethical reason for a Christian to be involved in marketing. I was a bit stunned because I have always seen marketing as a way of meeting the needs of other image-bearers. Hagenbuch (2016) opens his work with similar stories about the reactions to marketing that seem to be based more on societal stereotypes and anecdotal evidence than careful consideration of what the discipline of marketing actually means.

Hagenbuch (2016) tackles this mindset straight on and responds to the negative impressions that most hold in relation to the marketing discipline. This is the only book that I have ever read starting with the Appendix. For readers who are new to this discussion, Hagenbuch provides a copy of a previously published article, "Marketing as a Christian Vocation: Called to Reconciliation" (2008, *Christian Scholars Review*, 48, pp. 83-96). This piece is most helpful in explaining that the core focus of marketing is to maximize the value of exchanges between the consumer and the producer. He also unpacks and debunks several misconceptions about marketing that influence the kinds of reactions like those my colleague mentioned earlier. If you have students that need a quick primer on the place of marketing in the larger scope of business, just reading this article from the Appendix would be very insightful.

The first section of *Honorable Influence* lays a practical foundation for the explored in the rest of the book. A basic understanding of the discipline of marketing is offered along with an explanation of how it can be used to influence exchanges. "It's up to marketers, therefore, to let consumers know that the potential for exchange exists. This notification represents a key component of marketing influence. Most generally, influence is what makes most exchanges possible and profitable for both parties" (p. 15). Marketing is not solely concerned with influence

as it also is responsible for product development, delivery, and pricing. That said, the promotional portion of the marketing discipline is the most visible and therefore the most highly criticized of all its responsibilities, thus warranting a deeper look into how Christians should navigate through this difficult task.

The majority of the text is given to discussions that revolve around what Hagenbuch refers to as the "Seven Sins of Influence" (p. 7). Briefly defined they are as follows:

1. Deception: leading another to believe an untruth
2. Coercion: pressuring people to do something against their will
3. Manipulation: scheming to achieve an outcome that otherwise would not be chosen
4. Denigration: cheapening the inherent worth of people or things
5. Intrusion: entering another person's physical or mental space without the other's complete welcome
6. Encouraging Overindulgence: prompting excess beyond what's beneficial for individuals physically, emotionally, financially, or otherwise
7. Neglect: not offering the influence that is expected from a competent professional in a given field

Each chapter deals with a separate "sin" and provides a deeper definition and description of the phenomenon, a discussion of the issue from a biblical perspective, examples of how it can be seen in marketing practice, examples of how to avoid it in your own marketing practice, and finally an "Influence Tip" to guide future behavior. An example of one of the tips would be the response to the sin of denigration: "Influence Tip #4: To avoid denigration, show other people the same level of respect that you would like to be shown and treat the belongings of others (tangible and intangible) as if they were your own valued possessions" (p. 66).

The format of each chapter is the same, providing a great framework for discussing each topic with students. The book does not organize itself around the normal

framework of the 4-P's of marketing but mentions each of them when they are pertinent to the given sin being discussed in each chapter. This will also provide flexibility for the professor who chooses to use this as a supplemental text for any upper-division or graduate-level marketing course. I am sure that the text is accessible to the principles student as well, but the subtlety of the concepts might be difficult for beginning marketing students to fully grasp. Each chapter ends with a probing set of reflection questions to challenge the reader to think about each topic in relation to their own marketing practice. All research and secondary sources are well documented in case the reader wants to dive deeper into any of the topics covered. The text is full of scriptural references to allow the reader to read those passages and glean more from the biblical contexts being used to illustrate ethically sound marketing practice.

Honorable Influence ends with three key chapters that round out this discussion and make the book a valuable resource for marketing courses where the formal text does not include biblical perspectives. The first deals with how marketing, being cognizant the seven sins of influence, can be used in a church setting. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Corinthians 2:17, NIV). Chapter 11 deals with Christian ethics in a secular marketplace and provides a four-step process to finding common ground with others who do not share our faith foundation for decision-making. The book ends with a challenge toward a balanced approach to performing marketing tasks.

Honorable Influence provides a perfect starting place to begin deep and intentional discussions with our students about how followers of Christ can perform the functions of marketing in the corporate setting faithfully.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey K. Fawcett, DBA (Cleveland State University, 1999), serves as dean of the School of Business and professor of marketing at Grace College & Seminary. He has been involved in Christian business higher education since 1987 and the CBFA since 1989. He teaches courses in marketing, entrepreneurship, and the biblical foundations for business.