

View from the Bay: Climbing Mountains

by Tom Marx

Effective marketing is all about commitment, persistence and being willing to listen to the experts.

Many of you know that back in March 2006 I had a major accident while skiing one of my favorite black diamond slopes. I ended up having serious back surgery and a long, slow recovery. Given my persistence and my nature of pushing the envelope, sometime late last year I decided

that I would like to celebrate my recovery by fulfilling a life-long ambition – to hike to the summit of Mt. Whitney!

Mt. Whitney is the highest peak in the continental United States (14,505 feet above sea level). I have a group of five friends joining me for a 3-night, 22-mile backpack trip August 27-30. We're starting at an 8,000 foot elevation.

I tried to do this trek with my father in my late teens, got altitude sickness and had to turn back. The desire to complete the adventure has always been with me. First, I needed to get into better shape, with a focus on strengthening my legs and lower back. I also had to improve my cardiovascular endurance, because there isn't much oxygen at 14,500 feet, especially carrying a 40 lb. backpack.

My first steps were to find the right people and to develop a strategy. I found some friends to share the adventure. We planned the trip together, deciding on where we would camp (likely 3 nights in the wilderness), what food we would bring and how we would collaborate on equipment to lighten our load. Then I consulted the experts. I hired a physical therapist to design a strengthening program and joined an exercise facility that would not only honor my injury, but would support me with a program designed to achieve my goal.

Research was next. I haven't backpacked in years and equipment technology has changed so much. I started reading about the right kind of backpacks, hiking shoes, sleeping bags, stoves, water filters, and on and on. I went to Mammoth Lakes a few weeks ago to test the new equipment and see how my back and legs would stand up. Carrying a 35 lb. pack for 5 miles, I gained about 1500' to an elevation of 9500'. I gave myself a B-grade. Not bad.

The good news was that my back seemed to do fine and the bad news was that I needed A LOT MORE thigh strength and endurance. I returned to the physical therapist and we redesigned the program: back to the gym at least 3 days each week, plus a series of exercises to do at home on the off days.

Ok, so what's my story have to do with marketing? A lot.

What are the steps to an effective marketing program?

- Get the right people on the bus.
- Develop a strategy.
- Design a game plan that will help achieve the strategy.
- Do the research first (READY-AIM-FIRE) before launching marketing initiatives.
- Hire experts and get quality marketing support.
- Practice and test.
- Make honest assessments of the test results.
- Be willing to redesign on the fly.
- Commit to the success of the program, regardless of how difficult it becomes.

Americans Keep Cars Longer, Create Opportunities for Specialty-Equipment Businesses.

More Americans are keeping their cars longer, according to a recent report from R.L. Polk & Co. The automotive research firm found that the median age of passenger cars in operation increased to 9.4 years in 2008, breaking the previous two-year record high of 9.2 years.

Trucks are also aging. The median age rising to 7.6 years from 7.3 years in 2007.

This trend spells bad news for both new- and used-car dealers, but an opportunity for specialty-equipment businesses.

"I'm getting increasing requests from pre-owned dealerships to dress up high-end vehicles and quite a few theft recoveries from vehicles bought at auction," said Diana Braschler, president of Dealer Source Ltd. San Antonio, TX.

Braschler notes that dealer customers are increasingly paying more for used vehicles at auction or finding cars out of state to fulfill demand.

"One of my customers commented that the sale of new-to-used cars used to be four-to-one," Braschler said. "Now it's one new to four used."

R.L. Polk also noted the trend to keeping cars longer in a separate study. In a survey of U.S. consumers, 64% said they were "very or extremely likely" to keep their current vehicle longer due to economic conditions. Also, 81% of the 713 interviewed vehicle owners said they intended to take better care of their cars.

SEMA market research also shows that 83% of enthusiasts surveyed in January did not plan to replace their daily driver in the next 12 months. Sixty percent also said that they intended to accessorize their daily driver in the next year, while 65% agreed that keeping their vehicle longer than expected was the motivating factor in their accessorization plans.

Additionally, 47% of enthusiasts surveyed last fall said they purchased parts for their used vehicle to improve fuel economy.

It's an opportune time for businesses selling functional accessory and appearance products.

Source: R.L. Polk & Company/ SEMA