

BY ELISABETH A. SULLIVAN//STAFF WRITER

## GUERRILLAS IN THE MIST

GUERRILLA MARKETING WAS MADE FOR TOUGH TIMES. LEARN HOW TO DEPLOY IT.

**THESE DAYS, MANY** marketing departments feel like a dwindling party. Times are tight, and marketers are being asked to do more with less. Rather than cowering in the corner and waiting for the economy to normalize, get creative and try guerrilla marketing on for size.

You've no doubt heard of guerrilla marketing. The term was coined more than two decades ago by Jay Conrad Levinson, a former ad exec whose career stops have included Leo Burnett and J. Walter Thompson. After leaving the Chicago-based advertising world, Levinson taught a course on "alternatives to the 9-to-5 job" at the University of California, Berkeley, and his students—who all had big ideas but no money—asked him for a recommendation of a book about low-cost marketing. When Levinson went to the library, he found that no such book existed, so he decided to write one.

The 1984 book originated as a list of ways marketers can get their messages out while spending little or no money. That was "a great idea but a terrible title for a book," Levinson says. He wanted a title that conveyed the uniqueness, creativity, craftiness and solid effort necessary to make low-budget marketing work. He applied the term guerrilla to his first book, and it's still going strong more than 50 books and several million copies later.

"Guerrilla marketing is a way of getting more for your marketing dollar than any other way," says Levinson, now widely credited as the father of guerrilla marketing. "It's using unconventional ways to gain conventional goals."

Guerrilla marketing often is grassroots and unexpected, and usually concentrates on existing customers or prospects through targeted promotions. Think free consulta-

tions, demonstrations or speaking engagements. A well-networked blog or Web site, a viral video, contributed column, strategic partnership or cross-promotion. A well-placed poster or well-dressed promoter. "You have to realize that every contact with the public is marketing," says Mitch Meyerson, the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based founder of the Guerrilla Marketing Coaching program.

Rather than a substantial monetary investment, guerrilla marketing requires a significant investment of time, energy, information and imagination, Levinson says. It requires marketers to look beyond their traditional tactics and parameters, and strategically leverage every opportunity they have to connect with their customers on a one-to-one basis—or as close to it as possible.

Especially in this economy, guerrilla marketing tactics are "huge," Meyerson adds. "Guerrilla marketing, in fact, was made for tough times" because it is, by definition, a low-cost or no-cost way to market.

Levinson's business certainly has picked up in this economy. "More than ever. More speaking invitations than ever, more book signings than ever," he says. Business executives from as far as Macedonia are coming to him for help. "The economy is causing other nations to address the idea of guerrilla marketing."

There are hundreds of guerrilla marketing tactics—or "weapons," as Levinson calls them—to choose from (check Levinson's site, Gmarketing.com), and marketers should integrate dozens into their campaigns, Meyerson says. "Right away, that expands you out of your normal box of thinking." Rather than selecting just a few tactics to anchor your campaign, you're creatively integrating dozens, which requires some careful planning.

And planning, Levinson says, is half the battle. Good guerrilla marketing involves two steps. First, "start out with a simple marketing plan" expressed in a handful of clear and detailed sentences, he says. And second, "commit to that plan." Commitment is the hardest part, he says, as "it takes quite a while for marketing [messages] to catch hold."

Most of the best examples of guerrilla marketing are from small, local companies, Levinson says. One savvy guerrilla marketer is the owner of a New York state summer camp, he says, who runs tiny ads in the back of magazines or camp directories, runs a booth at trade shows and offers a free DVD to prompt interested consumers to request an in-home consultation. "She's putting hardly any money into marketing," and yet she's reaching interested parties in a very effective way, leading parents to sign up their kids, who encourage cousins, friends and neighbors to join them in a summer of fun, Levinson says. She's taking the time to establish relationships to build sales—a guerrilla marketing tenet.

Before you don your camouflage and set out to implement your own guerrilla strategy, take heed: Names can be deceiving. The term guerrilla marketing is often misapplied to marketing campaigns that include illegal graffiti, say, or some sort of ambush marketing tactic.

The term guerrilla, which dates back to the 1800s and means "little war" in Spanish, might connote aggression or underhandedness, but that's not what Levinson intended. "It's the opposite [of warfare]," he says. "It's about marketing by cooperation rather than competition. Not sneakiness, not ambush marketing... It's really a highly ethical way to do your marketing." **m**

### GUERRILLA 101

**GUERRILLA MARKETING ENCOMPASSES** some of the most basic marketing methods you can think of, but what makes them guerrilla weapons is the unique approach you take to them, says Mitch Meyerson, founder of the Guerrilla Marketing Coaching program.



**Speak at a Club:** Offer to speak on your topic of expertise at a local social club or business gathering. It's a very easy way to make yourself—and your business—known to the community.



**Neatness:** Presentation matters. Proofread your e-mails, invest in high-quality images for your brochures, and present your customers with clean communications and a clean environment.



**Barter:** Exchange services or expertise with a business peer. Work together to better your businesses—for free.



**Greet Customers:** Make an impression. Establish yourself as friendly, professional and ready to meet customers' needs.



**Availability:** Think beyond the normal 9-to-5. When do your customers really need you? When can you be open and ready for business when your competitors are not?