



# That's Guerilla not Gorilla: Guerilla Marketing 101

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Low-cost buzz. At its heart, that's what guerilla marketing is all about.

Coined in the mid 1980s by author Jay Conrad Levinson, the term guerilla marketing refers to any promotional activity outside mainstream media outlets. Guerilla marketers are do-it-yourselfers who rely on creativity rather than expensive billboards or glossy magazine ads.

As defined on [marketingterms.com](http://marketingterms.com), "guerilla marketing is more about matching wits than matching budgets." In the same way guerilla fighters use mobility and the element of surprise, guerilla marketers use unconventional, innovative tactics.

## Time, Energy & Imagination

These days, guerilla marketing comes in so many forms, it's difficult to pin down exactly what is and what isn't guerilla marketing. In the 'old days,' guerilla marketing meant public relations campaigns, customer appreciation days, and grocery store taste tests. Those activities still work, but today they are being supplemented by podcasts, blogs, and YouTube videos.

We could spend hours debating definitions and outlining parameters for guerilla marketing. But that would be beside the point. What is the point? It's that you don't have to spend thousands of dollars to get noticed. You just need time, energy and imagination.

In guerilla marketing, cash is not king. Traditionally the domain of small businesses and entrepreneurs, guerilla marketing is a way for the little guy to get some attention without breaking the bank. Ironically, the tactics have become so popular they've been co-opted by big business. Deep pockets like McDonald's, Saks and HBO are getting into the game, using expensive agency talent and high-profile stunts to take their products public.

But good ideas are still free for the having! All you need to compete is a little ingenuity, some get-up-and-go, and a sense of fun:



## Guerilla Marketing At Work

### McDonald's



Big, big company, easy idea. To launch their Premium Roast coffee line, McDonald's positioned staffers on the sidewalks of several metropolitan areas. Armed with cups and thermoses, the teams gave out free samples and coupons to passersby. Dunkin' Donuts did the same thing to launch their specialty espresso drinks.

**Takeaway:** The people you hire to hand out products, coupons or other promotional items in a public venue are called street teams. Hire a marketing firm to manage your street team promotion, or use your networking connections and engage a team of responsible students for a day.

Think about places and events your target demographic will congregate. Send your street team to greet people attending local athletic events, plays, concerts, farmers markets or festivals.

### Frank's Kraut



When the Fremont Company, makers of Frank's Kraut, wanted to boost sales, its marketing company got creative. Real creative. They declared that sauerkraut was sexy and set off to prove it. The linchpin in their campaign—the K'Tini, a vodka martini made with Frank's Kraut-stuffed olives. To promote the new drink, the company hosted K'Tini parties in nightclubs around the country and offered other club owners free K'Tini In a Box party kits. Within a month, Good Morning America made a K'Tini live on air, and both Associated Press and Knight Ridder news services circulated the story along with provocative graphics, ensuring placement coast to coast. By year-end, sales at the Fremont Company were up 30%.<sup>1</sup>



**Takeaway:** Another variation on the street team, club promotions are effective for more than just alcohol. Because different clubs attract different demographics you can really target your promotion. T-shirts and glasses are popular giveaways as are anything bright and blinking. Beyond promotional items, look for ways to engage clubbers in your product (ambush makeovers, taste tests, free trials, trivia, 'best seat in the house' contests) and/or drive them to your business.

<sup>1</sup>[www.bigfrontier.com/selectedcasestudies/thefremontcompany.html](http://www.bigfrontier.com/selectedcasestudies/thefremontcompany.html). Visited April 11, 2007. The Fremont Company. Making Sauerkraut Sexy.

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## Liberty Tax Service

Costumed characters are another guerilla marketing staple. During tax season, thousands of individuals across the United States dress up as the Statue of Liberty and Uncle Sam, acting as live advertisements for this tax services firm. Franchisees swear the tactic works. One owner interviewed for the Dubuque Herald estimated as much as one-third of her new business could be tracked back to outside signage and the smiling wavers.<sup>2</sup>

**Takeaway:** Costumed characters still work! Use your character to draw attention to the business and hand out coupons on street corners. Your character will be a welcome addition at parades and children's events. Just contact the organizers; they'll be glad to



have you. Coordinate with other local business owners who have costumed characters. Host mini-costume character competitions at community sport events, just like the Klement's Sausage Races at the Milwaukee Brewers' Miller Park.

## Interior Motives

A small business based in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Interior Motives sells high-quality used furniture and designer seconds. To draw more traffic, the owner established Girls Night Out, private shop nights when Red Hat societies or other ladies' groups book the store for the evening for a small fee. A variety of interior design professionals come to share decorating tips and provide free consultations. Local restaurants provide the food. The strategy has been so successful, available shop nights are booked months ahead. This has all our favorite tactics: creativity, cooperation, referrals, and giving away your knowledge—all at almost no cost to our clever guerilla marketer.

**Takeaway:** Partner with complimentary business owners to share expertise. Host special events that appeal to your target demographic. Offer educational seminars on cooking, construction, investment, decorating, understanding wine, music appreciation—whatever fits your product or service.

## Lee Mothes

Lee Mothes is a watercolor artist based in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. A California native, he paints seascapes and vacation homes. A few years ago, Mothes invented the Commonwealth of New Island, an

<sup>2</sup>Give me Liberty...and cheap advertising; Tax preparer says 'guerilla marketing' method works. By M.D. Kittle. Telegraph - Herald. Dubuque, Iowa: Feb 4, 2007. pg. A.1

imaginary island in the southern Indian Ocean. For \$20 Mothes will send you a relocation guide. For \$75, you can become a resident. You'll get the relocation guide, the official wandering guide, one brass coin in the island currency, a few picture postcards (painted by Mothes, of course), and the necessary paperwork to claim a 2-acre parcel in the country or a ½ acre parcel in the city, your choice. For an additional fee, Mothes will paint an image of your new home, or the seaside view out your window.

**Takeaway:** Invent your own holiday or goofy organization. Start an association complete with e-newsletters and badges. How about these: Organize Your Insurance Papers Day or Home Self-Inspection Day or Hammer Owners Anonymous. Remember the idea is to build awareness for your business and ultimately generate more sales.

## LG Mobile Phones

To entice celebrities to its 2006 Grammy party, LG distributed souped-up LG V phones with a video invite from Mariah Carey and Jermaine Dupri. In similar style, Sean Combs aka 'P. Diddy' sent out suede photo albums filled with pictures of past events to invite guests to his 29th birthday party. Not a deep-pocket celebrity? In Appleton, Wisconsin, organizers for Pulse, a young professionals organization, distributed strings of beads attached to an invitation for their Mardi Gras member recruitment event.



**Takeaway:** Sending a modest gift-invitation can help draw traffic to your event and increase company awareness both before and after the event. Use this tactic for company parties, special promotions and charity events. Hosting a luau—distribute leis. Furniture vendor—send out microfiber dusting cloths. Charity golf event—give your lead volunteers invitation-wrapped golf ball sleeves to distribute to their top prospects.

Mail items, hand them out personally, or ask a complimentary business owner to distribute them for you. Offering a new spa special? Attach an invitation card to a manicure buffer block or aromatherapy candle and ask a nearby clothing shop to drop them in customers' shopping bags.

Business

## Case Study: Filmmaker David Paterson

David Paterson is an independent film maker from New York. In 2005, one of Paterson's films, *Love, Ludlow*, was accepted for the 2005 Sundance festival. While admittance to Sundance is an amazing feat, Paterson was in no position to rest on his laurels. Hundreds of filmmakers are competing for attention at these events, and many have deep pockets. To take home a prize, your film must not only be good, it must be seen and it must be talked about.

Paterson had limited resources to produce his film, much less promote it. So before heading off to Sundance and with a little help from 4imprint, he stocked up on promotional products and launched a blog, providing a play-by-play account of his Sundance experience.

Paterson's blog posts were witty and honest, from pre-Sundance nerves, to the parties and ultimate reviews. Along the way, he shared his promotional efforts.

In one entry, he walks the streets of Sundance, pausing every 100 feet or so to slap a magnet on any metal surface that presents itself—lampposts, gates, the side of a local delivery truck. He runs into some festival volunteers and gives them *Love, Ludlow* caps. In exchange, they take him to the 'in' party where he hands out wristbands and more hats.



Among the promotional products Paterson used were nametag stickers with a flashing LCD light. On one evening, Paterson made plans to meet up with a fellow filmmaker, whom he'd never met, at an industry party. Paterson told the guy to find him by looking for the flashing light:

So I show up to this party, a typical, New York film industry party. This means the music is so loud you're afraid your ears will bleed and the lighting is so dim you can't see your hands. It was in this massive labyrinth-like party club where even if you could hear your cell phone ring, there's no reception to answer it.

So there's like no way this guy's gonna find me, right? Wrong.

Despite the three million or so people in this amazingly loud and unbelievably dark party, my guy saw this green blinking tiny light across the room. As a moth to the





flame, he squeezed by and around the babbling urban sea and found, David Paterson, leaning against a wall, casually sipping a beer.

"Cool light" he said, as he extended his hand. "I'm John-you're Dave, right?"

"Any trouble finding me?" I asked.

"Nope," he countered. "I saw the light"

With his dual e-marketing strategy and good, ol' fashioned man-on-the-street legwork, Paterson packed a powerful marketing punch. Within a few months his blog had drawn 8,000 visitors, renowned film critic Roger Ebert among them.

By necessity, Paterson had to be a guerilla marketer. He didn't have money to host his own parties. Nevertheless, he successfully generated buzz. Whenever he gave out hats or t-shirts, he effectively recruited walking-billboards to promote his movie. His Sundance screening sold out.

Not only that, but Paterson got noticed by some major industry players. Of the 1300 feature films submitted to Sundance, only 120 were actually accepted. Of those 120, just forty premiered as Jury or American Spectrum premieres. Of those forty, only fourteen got distribution. Love, Ludlow was one of those fourteen. Paterson also landed a deal with The Sundance Channel, one of only eight feature length films purchased. Last we heard, he hoped to turn a tiny profit.

Now here's the really exciting part. Soon after Love, Ludlow garnered industry recognition, David Paterson earned a major studio film deal as the writer/producer for Walt Disney Picture's Bridge to Terabithia. In theaters in spring 2007, the film is based on a story his mother wrote for him when he was a child. Now that's one heck of a marketing success story.