



## **Addressing Marketing Goofs**

*By Andy Holtmann*

Mistakes ... we all make them. Mistype an e-mail address, forget to spell-check something you've written, omit an important piece of information from a report. Hey, it happens.

But the biggest mistake that you can make is not taking steps to correct the mistakes you've made and learn from them.

As most of you know by now, I recently joined the Raving team as its new Vice President of Communications. I was formerly the editor of *Casino Journal* magazine, where I spent more than eight years. In September issue last year, my Editor's Letter took a matter-of-fact, albeit humorous look at how mistakes made by casino marketing teams can have lasting negative effects and things that you should look out for when crafting marketing messages.

Turns out, it was the most popular Editor's Letter I'd ever written, as I received dozens of comments, kudos and yes, even a not-so-nice critique of my critique. So, let's revisit, and expand on, this concept again:

Now, before I share some of the examples I've seen over the years, let me preface by saying that I am not perfect. I make mistakes all the time. What baffles me, however, is when I see the same mistakes over and over again. What baffles me even more is when people don't seem to care if something is incorrect, or maybe sends the *wrong* message.

Like the directions to a California casino that were clearly incorrect in an ad with a local visitors guide. The directions given sent people in the *opposite* direction, away from the casino. When I first saw the guidebook, I said to myself, "ooh, that's bad, but I'm sure they'll correct it in next year's guide." Two years later, it hadn't been.

Years ago there was a billboard alongside a Las Vegas freeway that advertised the "loosest slots in town." Pretty sure that was supposed to be "loosest." However, that billboard stayed the same for quite some time. Sure, it might have been expensive to replace, but if I were head of that property, I don't think I'd want people considering my slots the "loosest." The billboard, which, thankfully, has since been replaced, had another spelling error and a punctuation error to boot!

Also years ago, during one of my first trips to the Biloxi-Gulfport area, I saw a sign on the walls of one of the casinos there that read "Free Buffett with players club signup." Unless that meant rocker Jimmy himself was going to be given away, that was an obvious mistake.

Ah, but here's one of those seemingly insignificant ones that people don't seem to be learning from. In fact, it's only getting worse wherever I look now. I call it the possession apostrophe gaffe: Have you seen signs that read anything like: "Win 100's of dollars today," or "Voted best casino of the 90's," or "You could win \$1,000's?" Just pay attention to television commercials, you'll see it here a lot. And it's incorrect, because the apostrophe is meant as a possessive. What of \$1,000 am I winning? Is it \$1,000's car? Is it its house? Because that's technically what you're saying when you write it this way.

Of course now it seems while the apostrophe is overused, the comma is becoming extinct. Now \$1,000 is simply "\$1000" in many advertisements, billboards and direct marketing pieces. I even saw a run-on sentence a few months ago in an Internet advertisement for a car company that went something like this: "Come down today meet our new management test drive one of our 2007 models and get your free hot dog soda and collectors ball cap!" Lose you yet? It certainly lost me. I had to read it three or four times to tell just what the heck was going on there!

Here's a few more examples from the sending the wrong message department:

About five years ago, I was driving to the Midwest. Along the way, I saw a billboard that tried to advertise a casino's new showroom in text-message speak. I forgot exactly what it read, but it was something like: "LOL 2NITE @ (the showrooms name) N' STAY OVR'NITE!" In addition to text-message speak being annoying to read, it appeals to a younger generation, and this particular showroom was advertising a comedian that appeals largely to Baby Boomers. Perhaps not the best mix there.

Or how about the abbreviation of blackjack? Now, I know that abbreviating this popular table game is something that's been done for ages, but ask yourself this question: Is advertising a "BJ Tournament at XYZ Casino" really the message you want to be putting out there?

And please, please, please can we stop with the marketing images that appeal to minors? Yes, I know you're not *trying* to do it, but images of children's play blocks for a Christmas casino event or pictures of children when advertising a sense of feeling young again at your casino-resort isn't the right message to send. Casino regulators, politicians and community groups don't like it much either.

So, why is all this important? Well to me it's simple — perception. See, there are plenty of people with good intellectual sense who see these types of mistakes and get annoyed or turned off. And typically, those with higher education levels tend to be your more profitable customers with more discretionary income. They're more attractive to develop as loyal customers. So don't annoy them, don't send the wrong message and don't buy into the whole "America's dumbing down anyway so why bother" approach that I actually had one casino marketing professional argue to me a couple of years ago.

Mistakes happen. But not addressing them will certainly not help in appealing to your best customers.