

Mining Misfits – Roundtable Discussion: Industry Marketing

Discussion Overview & Debrief of Major Topics/Themes

1.0 Introduction

The Misfits (formerly known as the Mavericks) are officially back! While I know for some Misfits brings forth images of the Island of Misfit Toys from “Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer”, the Mavericks distinction never felt quite right (kinda like a wearing a wool sweater in the summer), so we’re reverting back to our Misfit roots! The Misfits got together recently to discuss marketing strategies by convening some of the brightest minds in the mining industry. We set out with the deliberate topic of understanding more about the intended audience, the messaging, and function of marketing (or lack thereof) in the mining and metals industry.

The function and purpose of marketing in mining are a bit elusive – some believe the purpose should be to attract new talent to our ranks, others believe brand marketing should be the focus, while another camp believes we need to improve the overall image, or public opinion, of the entire mining industry.

Further to this, there is no singular audience for marketing campaigns. As representatives of our various entities, we are constantly marketing to investors, to the public, and to the talent pool, to name a few. The product we offer sells itself, sure, but we seem to be caught in this constant cycle of justifying our existence. As one leader recently said “I’d like to see mining finally stand up for itself”. I think that’s well put...

It begs the question, how do we champion ourselves as we develop and bring to market products that make life as we know it possible in today’s society?

Rather than marketing, it seems as if we are collectively waging a messaging battle.

2.0 Audience and Customer

Ask any marketing professional, and they will tell you, one of the most important aspects of any successful marketing campaign is to know who your audience is, and to develop your messaging strategy with them in mind.

The challenge with marketing in the mining industry is that our audience varies from the communities we serve, to investors and financial institutions, to permitting and licensing agencies (regulatory bodies), to the ever-changing talent/resource pool, and to the human species as a whole.

As a result, the messaging strategy (or strategies) we employ for each of these demographics has to be adapted, custom-designed, to meet the specific application of what we are marketing, and who the message is targeting.

How we attract new resources to the ranks of our business is a vastly different messaging campaign than how we sell our service to affected communities. This does not mean that we lie or withhold information from one campaign to the next, but rather we focus on the areas that our audience holds the most stake in.

Communities want to hear about job opportunities, environmental impacts, social relations, and the like. The talent pool also wants to hear about job opportunities, but not from the perspective of what the company will bring to a community, but rather what the industry can offer to a career professional.

Investors want to know about the rate of return, and that the company is acting responsibly in terms of health, safety, environment, community, and sustainability to name a few.

Our global society also wants accountability in these arenas, but their focus has a broader range – sustainability of the entire globe, assurance than the mining industry has the interests of this planet, and its inhabitants, as a priority equal to sustaining the business itself.

If the task seems daunting, keep in mind that companies around the industry are stepping up their efforts to not only get the messaging right, but also improving their business day-to-day to make their commitment to those messages even stronger. As a technology-driven industry, we are leading the progress as champions of the future.

3.0 Getting the Message Across

One critical area that the mining industry has taken notice is how we actually get our message across. In recent years, many industry leaders made it their focus to “educate” the public about the necessity of our industry. As we know, society cannot continue in the way we live our lives without the benefits provided by precious metals.

What we also learned, is that telling the general public that they are wrong about us does not move the needle much in the court of public opinion. As one Misfit stated “calling out the ignorance of your opponent is not a strategy that’s proven to work” and as it relates to the mining industry our efforts to educate are falling on deaf ears.

What the Misfits pointed out is that there is a perceived clash of values between the necessity of mining, and the general populations view of the mining industry.

What is important to note, is this is becoming more of a perception every day, and less of a reality. There are blights in our record, no doubt. However, major mining companies around the globe have woken up to the absolute necessity to be good caretakers of the environment, of our communities, and to follow the lead of other industries in investing seriously into sustainability.

It might be time for us to stop following these examples, and start pushing the limits of our commitment. If we want to change public opinion, we should not call the public stupid, we should show them how serious we are about becoming leaders in sustainability, and living our commitment to community and environment.

We are poised to become the poster child of an industry, and many companies in our ranks are doing just that.

4.0 Differentiated Product

One recent development, and an example of setting example, was brought up by a Misfit in conversation. The example lies in the premise that the mining industry, historically, has not marketed a differentiated product. What this means, in summary, is an ounce of copper is an ounce of copper, regardless if it is sourced from a mine site in Peru, or a mine site in Nevada; from a major metal producer, or a junior mining company; from a mining company that values land rehabilitation, or one that strip mines without any concern for environmental impact.

Only recently have mining companies, investors, and global stakeholders started to blueprint a plan (more of an economic model) to change this. The concept is far from simple, but the logic and reasoning behind it is promising. It looks something like this...

Imagine as a commodity user (say Tesla for example), you can select your product based not solely on price per quantity, but rather making a selection to do business with a company with similar values. Tesla might set the standard for sustainability in today’s world. Tesla also has to procure large quantities of precious metals to keep their business in production. As such, would Tesla rather give their business to a company that exemplifies their values in commitment to environment, community and sustainability? If the price per ounce remains the same, but they can select their supplier based on that company’s demonstrated commitment to shared values, would it not make sense to do business with like-minded partners?

This approach is gaining momentum in the industry; and for good reason.

5.0 Conclusion

While marketing and messaging does present a significant challenge to our industry, and our track record does not necessarily exemplify a great deal of success, it is important to note that progressive leaders in our industry are making significant change to how we participate in the global economy.

We are a necessary industry, no doubt. But how we compose ourselves, and act collectively in today's changing world is ultimately what the general public will take notice of.

Go to the homepage of any major mining company in the world today (and many junior mining companies). Take note of what they are presenting. Read quarterly reports, notice the values they spotlight.

It is no surprise that other industries place significant emphasis on their core values of responsibility and sustainability. It is, however, a relatively new revelation that the mining industry is now catching up to these values. Perhaps more accurately, we are sharing the message of these programs that have been in place for decades.

The testament of our efforts will be demonstrated in how long it takes for us to be the example-setters, rather than the example-followers. Perhaps more important, the value of this will be in the trust and respect we gain as a result of these incredibly important efforts.

Let the message not be lost. Mining is here to stay, and we should set the gold standard for responsible and sustainable industry practices. We should show the public that we are leaders in these arenas they value so dearly.

Do you want to be an industry insider, and see what other leaders think about the challenges you encounter? We talk about the issues, so we can develop solutions and build better projects. It doesn't have to be so hard. Connect with me to learn what other leaders are doing to manage the challenges you are facing.

Many thanks, and much appreciated.

Jason Fearnow, Founder & CEO – Prime Contract Solutions