

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Spitzervision

By Tom Dreiling

Are you getting just a bit tired of the 24/7 coverage of the fall from grace of former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer? Good, so is most of the country, but try telling that to the major media. Those Yahoos never know when enough is enough.

Spitzer's personal problems as they relate to prostitutes has no impact on the rest of the country. He made some stupid — really stupid — choices in extra curricular activities. And now he must pay for this in whatever fashion he and his wife and three daughters choose. But that's their problem, not the nation's.

It is difficult to understand why MSNBC, CNN and FOX continue to cram that ugly story down our throats. Bet there are millions of Americans who never heard of the name Spitzer before he got caught with his pants down. But those three loud-mouthed cable networks won't put it to bed (no pun intended).

And they have the gall to sound apologetic every time the story of the *Spitzer Spill* is rolled out before the eyes of millions of Americans. Shame on them.

But such is the situation since the creation of the 24/7 news network. And don't expect anything to change. Those characters are fighting one another for viewers. Forget responsibility.

If anything, those three networks have given prostitution the advertising they can't buy. And plenty of it. And it's free! Every time Spitzer's face and the face of the 22-year-old beauty appear on your home screen, the bells on the cash registers of that illegal activity ring — loud and clear.

The past few weeks most of us have started receiving spring catalogs prepping us for the coming outdoor season. We aren't getting such catalogs from the ladies of the night. But the cable networks are serving the same purpose — electronically.

— Tom Dreiling, publisher Norton Telegram

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Colby needs to Speed up

It's true. Repeat customers are your best.

Even though it's not exactly a traditional retail experience, one company liked their experience in Kansas and is coming back. Mattel, the maker of Hot Wheels toy cars, will be on tour this year for its 40th anniversary and to celebrate the production of its four billionth car this year. Yes, that's 4,000,000,000. (A certain percentage of those are in my parent's basement.)

Hot Wheels is going to hit the brakes in Speed, the tiny town southwest of Phillipsburg, Aug. 24. Speed is so small, all the town's street signs are probably on the same pole. If all 4 billion cars would be poured on Speed, you wouldn't see the town anymore.

Hot Wheels was in Speed in August 2006 to celebrate the country's heritage with automobiles. According to newspapers, thousands of people were in town that day to see a parade, entertainment and some unique cars and Hot Wheels models. I've seen some people in Colby wear T-shirts made for that day.

Sure, it's easy to say Hot Wheels was strictly looking at marketing having their show in a town named Speed. (Imagine trial attorneys in Truth or Consequences, N.M.) But, obviously, with the response and support they got while there, they enjoyed rural Kansas' hospitality or they would not have wanted to come back.

Colby and Thomas County could use that concept and do something similar. Rather than more of an entertainment purpose, like what was done in Speed, Colby could go more informative.

Let me explain.



John Van Nostrand

Line in the Dust

With the coming of a Wendy's restaurant this spring, Colby will have most of the major players in the fast-food industry. (We still don't have Taco Bell or KFC, which have been tried in the past.) What complements all of that will be a new, bigger Taco John's and Subway restaurants. Fast-food is serious business here.

With a town the size of Colby and its location, the fast-food industry has importance to us. It would be interesting to see what is important to fast-food restaurant owners. So why not have a fast-food convention? Call it Fast-Food Fair.

Trade secrets and new-product ideas between franchises don't have to be exchanged — that's not the purpose. Owners and managers can share what's worked and what hasn't worked with employees, promotions, preparing for new buildings and general operations. What really are fast-food places doing to battle the obesity problem and poor-diet fads in America which fast food always gets connected to?

One thing I've already heard is the impact Wendy's and the growth in Taco John's will have on the labor pool. Will there be enough people to fill all those jobs immediately and

long term? Fast food is well known as a high-turnover industry.

I'm sure some of those things are covered in franchise newsletters and all, but, as we all should know, the exchange of information has much more impact when shared in person.

Many other industries have conventions. It's common for newspaper associations in each state to have an annual meeting. Service clubs, like Rotary and Lions, and church denominations do too.

We have the hotel space and meeting rooms for this kind of event. The Colby Community Building could be used, church fellowship halls, school cafeterias, gymnasiums and so on. Each "brand name" could have their own meeting location. Restaurant equipment vendors could have an exhibit on the community building floor.

The biggest trouble is access. Denver is the closest, major airport, but don't expect every administrator in the fast-food industry to show up. Regional owners and managers, who could comfortably drive to Colby, could come.

Colby is not unique in terms of the quantity of fast food places. There are other towns, smaller and bigger, across the country that have similar makeup. But Colby can be unique in inviting those operators to our town and give them a comfortable place to talk shop.

If the idea sounds silly, so be it. But look what happened to Speed and toy cars.

A burger-and-fries, a footlong or a taco can't be any different.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

A little appreciation goes a long way

I don't know about anyone else, but probably two to three times a week, there is at least one, and usually two, credit card applications in our mailbox. As for telemarketers, our family used to get an average of 10 calls per week, but we don't get those anymore.

Then a couple days back, while reading a magazine article, I ran across a story about credit card applications.

Would you be willing to guess how many credit card applications are sent out by these card marketers in just a period of four months? According to a tracking report firm, more than 1,000 million direct mail credit card packages were sent in just three months. Since credit card companies play on our temptation of greed — it's no wonder our country is in a pickle with debt.

And if it wasn't bad enough the amount of debt, it appears credit card companies weren't satisfied with the response to their offers at only 0.4 percent or about four million consumers.

The obvious conclusion would be consumers are being bombarded with credit card offers and have reached their saturation point or, for the most part, are becoming more responsible.

Not so. It seemed the reason for the downward spiral in response to credit card takers was a "no-brainer."

The "no-brainer" part of it? Credit card offers were too homogenous in appearance and lacking appeal.

One of the suggestions to solve the problem was to create a new direct mail approach by simply changing the look.

Now, I receive credit card applications looking more like a check or some type of business correspondence. Unlike the mailings a few years ago that looked like a credit offer — the new, improved look keeps me guessing whether or not I need to at least check out what's in



Patty Decker

Deep Thoughts

the envelope.

Some of the offers even come in 6" x 11" to 9" x 12" envelopes with special embossing on the outside.

Credit card businesses are taking bold and different steps to snag us with their 21 to 29 percent interest rates. What a deal! Not!

I have received envelopes marked "official document" with something on the front saying "Form 5144 Enclosed" or boxed off warnings against tampering with mail. The idea behind the warning is to give the impression that this piece of mail sounds "very official."

Gimmicks and marketing strategies — it should insult everyone's intelligence.

On the other hand, I am a fool for new products — and it's all about the way it's packaged. But again, I try not to be too stupid, realizing that packaging and marketing play a huge role in winning me over on a particular item.

Sometimes the products are worth trying even though I know that "Brand X" will probably work just as well or taste just as good.

Throughout history, people have always tried to come up with just the right approach to get others to buy their products. Jingles and other catchy phrases are one way, but then there's other ideas that have been used and re-used in the hopes of convincing someone that they can't live without a particular thing, person or service.

Years ago, my father had a job selling aw-

nings. It was a temporary job, but still he was always trying to come up with an "edge" on the competition. In staff meetings, the salesmen would make up songs about the company to inspire them.

They would even have prizes for the person who could sell the most siding or awnings.

Advertising is a good thing, but sometimes I think companies go too far and end up losing clients. One particular example is offers for magazine subscriptions. Again, my situation is no different than anybody else. How many times have we all opened up a magazine to find thousands of insert cards fall out with great introductory prices that will save us anywhere from \$5 to \$10 off a subscription price?

Have you ever noticed that these offers aren't available to the loyal consumer who has been buying the magazine for years? And while I don't see anything wrong with special offers to try something new, I do think it's wrong to leave out the person who has been faithful for years.

What usually happens in these special offers is many local customers have got smart and will allow their magazine subscription to lapse for a certain period of time and wait until they can get in on the special introductory offer.

One possible solution might be to go ahead and give the newcomer a special deal, but for the others, maybe provide a sneak preview of new merchandise coming (if it's a catalog) or some other idea to make the loyal customer feel special.

Whether we are thinking as a business person or as the consumer, the point is, we need to remember the buyer and know that he's not fooled easily. A little appreciation can go a long way.

Oh, and by the way, I throw those credit card offers in the trash as soon as they arrive — I learned my lesson.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

