

The Status Quo Trap

Don't let a fear of change cloud your decisions.

Decision making skill is often a key component in what separates the successful from the unsuccessful in business. Assuming you accept this thesis, then the obvious question is “What can I do to make better decisions?”

Sometimes you gotta go with your gut. But regardless of your innate talent, there is a great deal of knowledge that you can apply towards improving your decision-making abilities. One of the best books I've read on this topic is called *Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions*.

The book discusses some of the psychological traps that get in the way of better decision making. One trap that is particularly relevant to marketing is something called the Status Quo Trap.

The fact is that most of us have a strong bias towards alternatives that perpetuate the current situation. Not changing is often the most comfortable option, isn't it?

In one interesting experiment, a group of people was randomly given one of two gifts. Half received a decorated mug; the other half got a large Swiss chocolate bar. They were then told that they could effortlessly exchange the gift they received for the other gift. One would expect that about half of the people would exchange, but only one in ten actually did. The status quo exerted incredible influence, even through it was arbitrarily established only minutes before!

So, how do you avoid this trap? Above all, it is important to evaluate each option based on its own merits. In any given decision, be aware that you may unconsciously give some options extra weight just because they more closely perpetuate the status quo.

The book offers these techniques to help avoid this trap:

- » Always remind yourself of your objectives and examine how they would be served by the status quo.
- » Ask yourself whether you would choose the status quo alternative if, in fact, it weren't the status quo.
- » Never think of the status quo as your only alternative. Weigh the plusses and minuses of all options.
- » If several alternatives are clearly superior to the status quo, don't default to the status quo just because you have a hard time picking the best one.
- » Avoid exaggerating the effort and cost involved in switching from the status quo.

So whether you're evaluating an aggressive marketing tactic, a risqué new campaign, a website redo or maybe even an upgraded graphic identity, change can sometimes be a very good thing.

Don't be scared.

