

A close-up photograph of a banana peel lying on a light-colored, textured sidewalk. In the background, a brown leather shoe is visible, slightly out of focus. The scene is set outdoors on a sunny day, with a blue sky and some greenery visible in the far background.

SEVEN MARKETING MISTAKES TUTORING COMPANIES MAKE

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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SEVEN MARKETING MISTAKES TUTORING COMPANIES MAKE

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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- INTRODUCTION -

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In writing this short ebook, we set out to identify a few of the **common mistakes** that tutoring companies make when attempting to promote their tutoring services. This is by no means intended to be a comprehensive list. **While the mistakes we've chosen to profile are not committed universally, the challenges that drive tutoring companies to commit these errors are present in virtually every market we've studied.**

We hope that as you read this you'll be able to celebrate having avoided a few of these mistakes. That said, we hope that you'll **cringe at least once** as you come across a mistake you're currently making. Without those **cringeworthy moments**, you'd have nothing to improve upon. And if you've got nothing to improve upon, then your business has gone as far as it can go.

With that in mind, we hope you'll see this ebook as **an opportunity to discover new ways to grow your tutoring company.** Enjoy!




MISTAKE #1 NOT SHOWING UP TO TEST PREP EVENTS

Would you like to host a free information night for students and parents to learn about standardized tests and college admissions? Of course you would! **But have you told anyone that you're available?** High school counselors, principals, and PTA presidents should be fully aware that you're the one to call anytime they're even considering hosting an event.

Get on the phone. **Show up in person!** Find the gatekeeper and make sure that person knows that you're the local test prep expert. Make sure he or she knows that you're available to speak anytime they're able to assemble a crowd. Then, when you do deliver a presentation, you've got to **make the gatekeeper look good.** The gatekeeper's desire to look good will play a major role in deciding whether or not to invite you to future events. Prepare accordingly.

Also, be prepared to make any event into a **test prep event**. It's easy to do. **If you show up playing the trombone, you are the brass section.** That's just a fact. The same goes for test prep. If you show up talking test prep, you are the test prep expert. How you carry yourself defines who you are, and who you are helps define the events you attend.

College night? **RSVP yes.** Back to school night? **Absolutely.** Career day? **Be there.** Whatever the event, **show up**, introduce yourself as a test prep expert, and you'll be amazed how many people want to talk about test prep.



**Brass
Section**



MISTAKE #2

NOT FOLLOWING UP WITH TEST PREP STUDENTS

Nobody ever became a tutor because they had a knack for sales and a passion for CRM software. Even so, there are a few **basic skills** that you'll need to develop if you want to grow your tutoring company with test prep. One of the most important skills is knowing **when to follow up** with current and potential test prep clients.

The general rule is this: reach out to parents of your students whenever you've got **valuable information** to share with them. Then, put in the time to deliver those updates, announcements, congratulations, and reminders in a way that's **easy to understand** and **immediately actionable**. Don't make parents aware of problems that you aren't going to help them solve. **Keep your content actionable!**

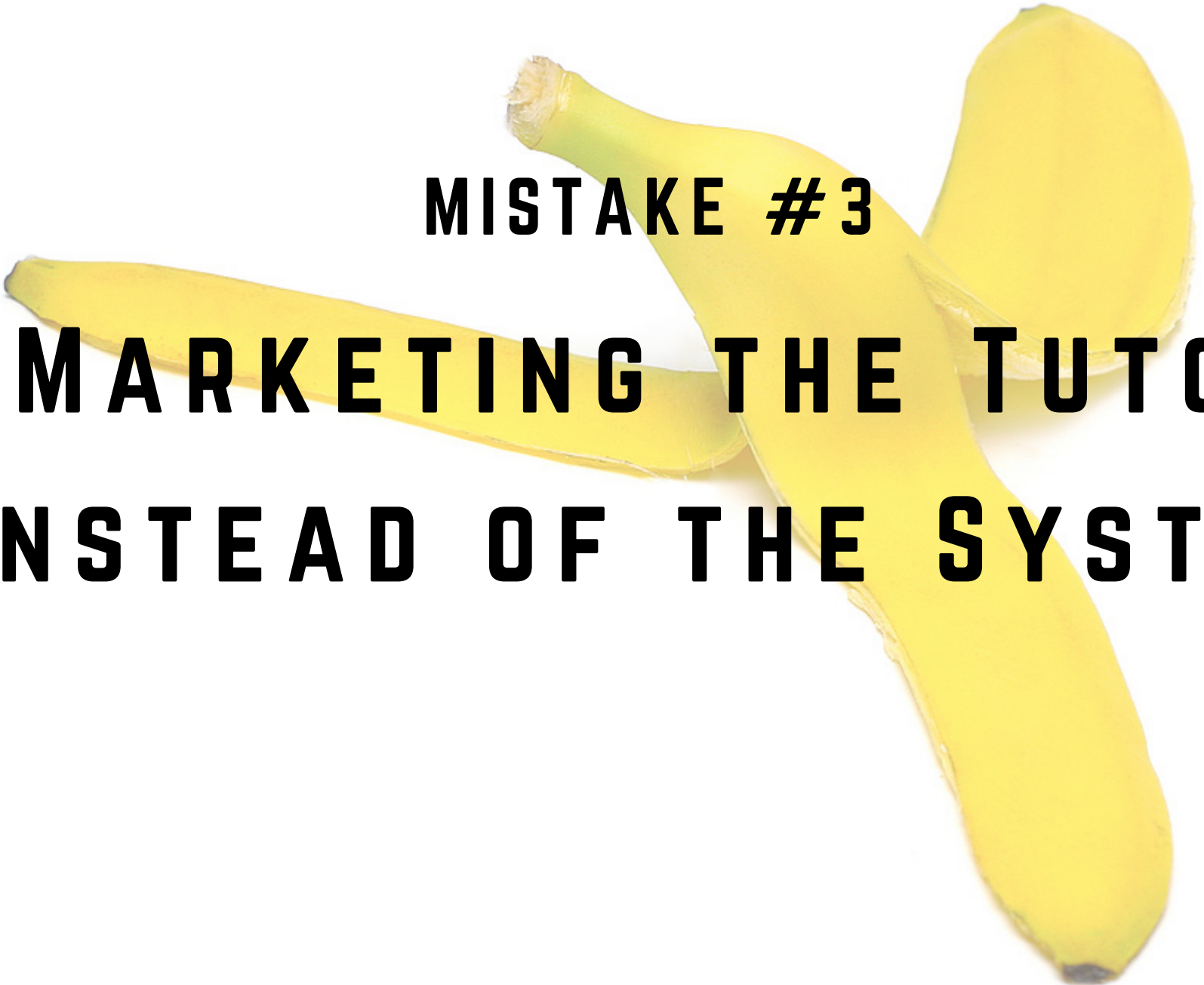
Is Friday the last day to register for the next SAT test? Parents will no doubt appreciate your **sharing a link to the registration page**. Are your ACT courses filling up? **Email a link to the signup page**. Did one of your students just get into Yale? Very cool! Get permission to post a **congratulations note** on Facebook with a link to the SAT prep course the student took with you last spring.

Remember: every communication must be easy to understand and immediately actionable.

Following up for no good reason is just lazy advertising.



**Following up for
no good reason
is just lazy
advertising.**

A yellow banana peel is positioned diagonally across the upper half of the page, with its stem pointing towards the top left and its tip towards the bottom right. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

MISTAKE #3

MARKETING THE TUTOR INSTEAD OF THE SYSTEM

Independent tutors and local tutoring companies must compete against **test prep giants** who literally wrote the book on test prep. As a result, it can be tempting to make tutoring more personal. There's nothing wrong with that, but it can be a mistake to become overly reliant on marketing yourself as a tutor.

If you become indistinguishable from your product, then guess what. **You are the product — and that's a problem.** This problem can make it nearly impossible to grow your tutoring company. It's difficult to sell new clients on working with anyone besides the face of the company. **This limits your growth in a number of ways.**

First of all, you've only got so many hours in the day, and you can't **scale your business** if you've got to tutor every student personally. And without a **test prep system** to promote and rely on,

you have **no choice** but to hire tutors who claim to be test prep experts and can work with very little oversight. In order to book clients for these tutors, you must promote their skills as equal to your own.

As a result, these tutors are **more costly** to employ and better positioned to **poach clients** when they eventually do leave. The only way to avoid this unfortunate situation is to consciously and deliberately **build value into your brand** and not yourself or your tutors.



Click Here
to check out our blog
post: Is Your Top Tutor
Preventing the Growth
of Your Test Prep
Company?




There is nothing wrong with comparing yourself to the competition, especially if you do compare favorably to another test prep provider in your market. **Make sure that any comparison you outline is fair and accurate.** Most test prep customers don't have much industry awareness, but that doesn't mean they can't spot a bogus comparison sheet or an unfair business tactic. **Anything you put on your website must be 100% true and accurate.**

When parents ask you about other formats of tutoring or test prep, such as **Khan Academy**, self-study test prep books, group course test prep, and one-on-one test prep, it's important that you be honest in your appraisal of the pros and cons of each test prep format. **Focus on the strengths of your test prep system, not on the weaknesses of others.** To the best of your ability, you should

always strive to be a source of unbiased information. **You are, after all, helping students make choices that will affect the trajectories of the rest of their lives.** That is a sacred responsibility that should never be abused.

In the end, you'll actually get more business for being honest than you could ever hope to get by bad-mouthing your competition. Remember, you can only be a **trusted advisor** so long as you are committed to giving unbiased advice. If you choose to bad-mouth the competition, you do so at the cost of your **credibility**.



Would you trust
a test prep tutor
who had **NOTHING**
nice to say about
the competition?



Most tutors understand that bad-mouthing the competition is a bad idea, but they don't always realize that promoting the competition is also a problem. **More accurately, many tutoring companies and independent tutors are actively promoting their competition — without even realizing it.**

When you meet with parents for a score consultation, what do you put on the table in front of them? You probably wouldn't answer, "**an advertisement for my competition,**" but in reality that's exactly what most independent tutors do when they utilize test prep books that are emblazoned with the competitors logos, marketing language, and offers of **free test prep goodies.**

McGraw Hill, Kaplan, and Princeton Review are all in the test prep business. Sure, these companies make money when your students buy their books, but they also tutor students online

and in-person. Even ACT and College Board provide test prep directly to students. When you promote their resources, you're unintentionally communicating to parents that you're not the source of the best test prep. If you were, why would you be using their test prep books?

Fortunately for you, **Clear Choice Test Prep** has you covered with a **100% white label test prep solution**, including custom branded workbooks and online resources like quizzes, practice test score reports, and emailed progress reports.

Even if you insist on using an **over-the-counter book**, there's one simple change you can make to avoid further undermining your credibility as a test prep expert. **Never ask students or parents to purchase the course workbook online.** Always deliver the book to the student in person.

If you send them to **Amazon** to click around looking for a book, you're exposing your clients to dozens of competitors' carefully crafted **marketing language** before your first scheduled session. Not only do you risk losing the client, but more importantly, you're creating the impression that **your tutoring is a commodity**. That is not the message you want to send.

Two peeled bananas are positioned behind the title text. One banana is on the left, and the other is on the right, both slightly curved and overlapping.

MISTAKE #6

CHARGING CLIENTS TO HEAR YOUR SALES PITCH

If you're not hosting regularly scheduled, FREE, full-length practice SAT & ACT tests, then you're not taking advantage of **the single best way to promote** your test prep services. You should get that sorted out immediately. If you've got questions, check out our blog posts on ***The Dos and Don'ts of Tutoring with Real SAT Tests***. Also, if you're not using real tests — or if you're illegally using unreleased or photocopied tests — then you're doing it wrong. **That's no way to grow a legitimate test prep business.**

More to the point, parents and students have tons of questions about standardized tests, especially the new SAT. If you try to charge them to get the answers from you, then **they'll look someplace else**. And almost everywhere they look, they'll find someone selling online test prep, one-on-one tutoring, group tutoring, or a test prep book.

Imagine how refreshing it will be to meet you, a test prep expert, who provides a **FREE full-length diagnostic test**, a **FREE analysis of their test results**, and a **FREE college admissions consultation** to help them decide the best way to proceed with test prep. If you do this correctly, the parents will be grateful to you for taking the time to meet with them. **That's the goal.** It's easily achieved, but there's only one way to do it.

The only way to achieve this goal is to make a genuine effort to deliver as much value as possible to your clients, before, during, and after their test prep course. You might consider this to be unpaid labor, but it's actually quite the opposite. Obviously, you can make some money by charging clients to meet for initial consultations, but only a fraction of what you give up by **charging parents to hear your sales pitch.**





MISTAKE #7 PAYING FOR TEST PREP REFERRALS

It's important to ask for referrals. Parents and students will be eager to promote your tutoring services once you've delivered an exceptional test prep experience.

Help them help you by providing them with a branded one-sheet they can hand off to friends and acquaintances or put up in the break room at work. In general, **happy parents are eager to refer**. It gives them a chance to talk about how smart their kids are, after all.

The entire relationship changes when you offer to pay them. First of all, parents who can afford premium test prep services don't need your \$50 referral bonus.

Honestly, \$50 wouldn't motivate most students today. Furthermore, the very act of **accepting cash for referrals feels wrong**. The same goes for iTunes gift cards, free tutoring, or anything else you dangle in front of them — **it's still a kickback**.

And it's still insulting.

Consequently, any increase you might see in referrals will be more than offset by the referrals you lose by leaving clients with a bad taste in their mouths. **Instead, simply remind your clients that your company depends on word of mouth referrals.** Remind clients of this as often as you feel you can without seeming pushy or desperate. One technique is to add a referral request to the end of your email signature in the form of a statement **thanking clients for their referrals.** Then trust your clients to enthusiastically recommend your test prep services.

Make it as easy as possible for happy clients to recommend your tutoring services. Supply them with **professional-looking marketing collateral.** Be sure that your homepage has been updated, so clients won't be embarrassed to share a link with friends. Consider starting a **simple email newsletter** that they can forward to friends. At an absolute minimum, make sure that every satisfied customer receives a link to your **Yelp! page**, so they can effortlessly leave you a five-star review.

If you deliver a good value to your customers, they will happily recommend your tutoring — unless you cheapen the relationship with a kickback.





At **Clear Choice Test Prep**, we've been helping tutoring companies to improve and expand their test prep services since 2006. In the years since then, we've worked with hundreds of tutors across the U.S. and around the world. What we've come to realize is that, while every market is different, the challenges encountered by tutors and tutoring companies within those markets are largely the same. And in observing the **trends, behaviors, and attitudes** that correlate with **success and failure**, we've had ample opportunity to document what works — and what doesn't.

We put together this ebook to help independent tutors and tutoring companies **identify *and overcome*** the most common mistakes that we've seen thwart their growth. We hope you take that seriously, especially the second part about overcoming the common mistakes. **That's the fun part.** That's why we do this.

And to whatever degree you take the advice in this ebook to heart and make **significant changes** to your attitude and approach to growing your business,

you can expect to see an equally significant increase in the return on your efforts.

To put it another way, identifying problems is the easy part. Anyone can do that. Thoughtfully considering the **underlying causes** of those problems and confidently implementing **meaningful changes** is the only way to improve this situation. Indeed, it's the only way to improve any situation. And it's the only way that any organization has ever achieved the kind of success you're seeking.

With that in mind, we recommend that you **revisit each section of this ebook** to glean from it all that you can. Naturally, we don't expect that every section will be perfectly applicable to all readers. That said, we compiled this list of mistakes not just because they're common, but also because they're representative of the kind of mistakes that independent tutors and tutoring companies tend to make.

The mistakes on this list commonly result from hastily applied BAND-AID style fixes that do not actually address the deeper issues faced by the tutoring companies.

A great example is the problem faced by tutoring companies with undifferentiated products. **If you, as a talented and articulate tutor, cannot explain what makes your test prep services different and better for a particular customer, then you may have an undifferentiated product.**

Furthermore, as a small business owner competing against test prep industry giants, you are at a **severe disadvantage** until you can effectively communicate the features and benefits that only your test prep can deliver.



We include this example because **we actually faced this problem around 2006**, during the early days of our company. Initially, we "solved" this problem by whipping up some **marketing language** about how dedicated our tutors were. We trumpeted our stellar score improvements, while avoiding any mention of how few students we'd actually worked with to that point. We covered our website with stock photos of books, apples, **smiling students**, and graduation caps in flight.

Finally, we did what every other tutoring company in that position does: we claimed to be the best without providing any particular indication that our claims were remotely valid. If any of **these tactics** sound familiar to you, then you won't be surprised to learn that they didn't have much of an effect on ability to grow our business. That's because none of these fixes did anything to address the deeper issue: **we couldn't explain why parents should hire us instead of hiring someone else.**

Finally, we did what we should have done from the start: we got to know our product — and ourselves — for the first time. **We stopped trying to sell the product we had and we started creating the product we wanted to sell.** We became obsessed with finding new ways to create an exceptional test prep experience for our customers. What happened next was amazing.

We began developing a test prep system that nobody in the industry could match. Many of these features are still unique to our system. We created **concept-centric workbooks** that help students in ways standard practice tests simply cannot. We engineered a **diagnostic test grading tool** that provides **detailed analysis** of the



student's performance, concept by concept. We designed a **custom quiz generator** that helps tutors further target the areas of greatest potential improvement for each individual student.

We recorded **hundreds of hours of video solutions** to provide students with **instant feedback** and **support *between* sessions**. We added a feature that allows students to **flag problems for review** at the next session, so tutors know exactly what to prepare for ahead of time and don't have to waste time grading homework assignments during sessions. Then we expanded this system by creating **class management tools** that enable tutors to rapidly analyze the performance of an entire class. These features have saved tutoring companies countless hours of prep time.

We saw time and again that **students succeed when they're held accountable** for the effort they put into the course. With that in mind, we built a system that allows tutors to **automatically generate and send email progress reports** to parents, teachers, and other tutors. This one feature has saved tutoring companies **thousands of hours** that used to go into updating parents on the students' progress through the course.

Turning our attention to efficiency, we created a **course template system** that enables tutors to lay out an entire course with a few clicks. Then we updated that system to make the templates **customizable** and **100% editable** throughout the course. We learned the importance of testing and refining new features.

We designed and piloted dozens of new features. Some were great. Some were no good at all. We designed a **calendar interface** for students that looked like it was



made out of sticky notes. It was **fantastic-looking**, but it confused everyone who tried to use it. So we replaced the sticky note calendar with our **lesson map** interface and discovered that it actually fixed that and a whole bunch of problems that neither tutors nor students had previously known they were experiencing.

Somewhere along the way we realized that we had become educational software and curriculum developers. So we began to reach out and partner with tutoring companies and test prep providers all across the country. It was a major success for our company, but it also meant we had to **relearn** what our new target customers wanted, so we could find new ways to deliver as much value as possible.

We fine-tuned our user interfaces and integrated **one-click help resources** throughout the system. We built a stand-alone **Tutor Certification Course** to help tutors get up to speed as quickly as possible. We began offering **email, phone, and "online office hours"** for additional training and tech support.

New clients came with new ideas for new features, some of which were good. Many were bad. We built all the good ones — and some of the bad ones. **We read most of a book by Steve Jobs.** We learned to say no, to keep things simple, and to strip away unnecessary pieces. **Most importantly, we stayed 100% focused on creating value for our clients and their brands.**

That focus paid off in the form of word of mouth referrals. We began to field requests from independent tutors and tutoring companies all across the U.S. and increasingly around the world. Clients demanded we launch an ACT system to match our SAT system. **So we did.**



Then we went white label. Because the best way to help build value into someone else's brand is to help them **show off that brand!** The decision to provide **custom branded test prep materials** was not taken lightly. It added immense complexity to our business operations. But **it was the right move**, and it has enabled us to learn far more about the industry as a whole because we were forced to study each market from the perspective of each partner. And without learning all of this, we could not have envisioned **the next generation of features** we're working on now.

If you're interested in any additional information about these features or how we help tutoring companies to grow their business, please take a moment to sign up for a FREE software demo.

We'll show you just how easy it is to get started. And we're always available to **discuss your goals** and brainstorm the best way to help you and your company to achieve your objectives. We hope you've found this ebook useful, and wish you all the best in your efforts to **grow your tutoring company!**

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Written By Matt McCorkle | Cofounder



Matt oversees the ongoing creation of Clear Choice Test Prep's engaging and effective curriculum. He also assists with the training and support of new and existing partners to ensure that everyone who launches the custom branded test prep system has everything they need to thrive and grow. He also is a frequent contributor to the [Clear Choice Test Prep Blog](#) where he shares the insights he has gained from more than a decade in the test prep industry. When he's not working, he enjoys listening to podcasts and training for obstacle course races.