

Advertising Fax

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ISSUE 61

KNOW YOUR POSITION IN THE MARKET.

One of the first steps you should take before you begin to create a marketing communications strategy is to determine your true position in the market. This shouldn't be your best guess or what you feel, but should be based on actual measurements against your competition. This can be accomplished through benchmark studies available from research firms and some publications. Your actual position — who knows you, who knows your competition, and what they think about both of you — will dictate how you approach the market. This benchmark also provides a reference point from which you can judge the success of your strategy at a later date. Often this process identifies opportunities that are untapped by both you and your competition.

If you are the leader in your markets, you would want to build on your current position and prevent advances by those below you. If you are a close second, you would probably want to differentiate yourself from the leader by presenting yourself as a better alternative. If you are a distant second, third, fourth or less, you want to level the playing field somehow so that you are considered in the decision. This might be accomplished by simply raising awareness of your company as an option. Or it could require educating the market that, one, you actually exist and, two, you really have a better product or service.

Your objective is to be considered when companies are making the purchase decision to be a player. How you go about creating that impression in a credible way depends on your position.

ARE YOU LEAVING MONEY ON THE TABLE?

Have you ever noticed how many business ads you see tend to sign off with a vague "call for more information" reference. This is basically leaving money on the table...if you want your advertising to support sales. The investment you make in advertising can be optimized by "closing the loop." In other words, the ad should be part of a series of events that lead to the opportunity for a sale.

Moving the reader to act should be as important as getting them to read the ad. To spike response, try to offer something of value, such as whitepapers, performance comparisons, and other types of information. To further close the loop, the response package should be designed to make a compelling sales story, and to make contacting a salesperson very easy.

MAKING CONTACT.

One critical element in successfully working with the media is to always provide current contact person information. There are many ways to communicate with the media today and you should always provide a variety of ways to reach your contact, including phone and fax numbers, as well as e-mail addresses.

And don't fall into the trap of listing an expert as a point of contact if they are difficult to reach on an on-going basis. The contact person doesn't always have to be the expert as long as they are skilled in tracking down the requested information or scheduling interviews, and it is fine to list more than one contact. Timely response and accurate information are what counts when it comes to successfully securing positive editorial coverage.

E-MAIL AS A MEDIA TOOL.

The Internet is here...and it's a communication vehicle that refuses to be ignored. More and more correspondence is taking place on the Internet and it should be an integral element of your

communications efforts.

Just as in any form of correspondence, you must become the master of the medium. Learn a variety of ways to attach documents and send graphics so you can fire off information at a moment's notice without technological downtime. And if you're not sure how easy it will be for the recipient to access your attachments, you can always embed the copy right into the e-mail itself.

We use the Internet as a primary communications vehicle when working with the media. We can inundate the media with detailed information in a "ready to publish" format which dramatically decreases the amount of time an editor typically spends reworking a news release and creating an article. Remember whatever you can do to make the editor's job easier goes a long way in creating long-lasting relationships and positioning you as a cooperative and knowledgeable industry expert.

DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES UP FRONT.

Marketing without an objective is akin to driving forward using the rear-view mirror — you're never really sure where you're going and you have no idea when to stop. In order to develop any sort of actionable communication strategy, you must define an objective. If you have multiple objectives or markets, they should be identified and pursued as such. Lumping everything together will only serve to, at best, dilute your message and, at worse, confuse your customers. Your objectives should be based on your current market position and your predictions of future market events. Decide where you want to go, then determine the best way to get there.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE FOR BETTER RESULTS.

Before you can create a successful advertisement, you have to know who your audience is. People are more responsive to ads that address their specific needs and interests. However, identifying a job title is not always enough. You have to know what motivates your readers and learn how to communicate with them effectively.

Part of understanding your readers is knowing what issues they face in their industry. People are only interested in products or services that solve their unique business problems. Once you figure out what issues affect your audience, build your company's solution around them.

Knowing your readers also means understanding their language. Find out what terms and phrases are popular in the industry and refer to them in your ad. But be careful not to use outdated terms. If readers don't believe you know what you're talking about, they'll probably feel the same way about your products and services.

Another aspect of understanding your readers is knowing their level of expertise. If your message is too elementary, you could bore an experienced audience. If your message is too technical, you could abandon less-experienced readers. Determine your audience's level of expertise by reviewing the publication's readership studies and formulate an ad based on your findings.



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