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Marketing: the Roots of your Business

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ABSTRACT

Today's culture is in a constant state of flux. The ways we think, plan, and communicate are changing rapidly. Why should that matter to you? Because you have marketing and sales goals to meet. You need a successful sales process. Your methods of communication with colleagues are critical to the success of your day, projects, and professional enjoyment. Here I present the 13 key techniques for implementing a successful marketing strategy. What follows is practical information. If you take time to ponder the application of these techniques, you can improve your marketing and sales.

KEY WORDS

public relations, communication, advertising, branding

The Elements of Marketing

The elements of marketing you may be able to apply are:

- :: Your Marketing Toolbox
- :: Public Relations
- :: Communications and How We Think
- :: Customer Service
- :: Word of Mouth Advertising
- :: Catalogues
- :: Website
- :: Packaging
- :: Direct Mail
- :: E-mail
- :: Trade Shows
- :: Advertising
- :: Branding

These tools will help you turn the features of your products and services into benefits. A feature is defined from your point of view; a benefit is defined from the customer's point of view. The potential customer has to be helped to understand why you are the right choice for him or her. In this way, you lead them to the decision you want them to make, that is, choosing your product or service.

Repositioning your descriptions and statements may require an attitude shift in your thinking—don't let yourself become stale and stuck in a rut. Effective marketing communication relies on content, a consistent company message and style, and a clear call to action.

Shifting your thinking requires some mental work. “It is imperative to frequently get your head out of the business and into something else. If not, you chance becoming one-dimensional and going stale” (Hatch 2007). Lee Iacocca learned from experience, “I can accomplish a year’s work in eleven months, I cannot do it in twelve.” Many of us assume, if we work harder and longer, we will do better. That is not always the case. The following tools are designed to help you be prepared to meet your marketing challenges and avoid some of the multitude of “scrambles.”

Your Marketing Toolbox

Your basic tools include the company logo, tag phrase, consistent colors, and a consistent design style.

Whether you are selling business-to-business or retail, or you are working on your intra-organization communications, you must be able to answer the questions:

- Who are my customers?
- To whom is my message directed?
- What is their expectation?

Finally, with the above tools in place, what are you going to do with them? Your Marketing Plan will answer that question. Remember, if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.

Having these tools cleaned and sharpened enables you to shape and implement your sales or communications plan.

Consider this illustrative story about the farmer who was located on a windy bit of ocean-front property. When the frequent storms hit, the animals often escaped as the wind loosened their gates and destroyed fences. Equipment was damaged when left outside or the barn doors slammed open. When his strong, young, hired hand moved on, the farmer was desperate to find a strong replacement, capable of battling the winds and preserving as much of the farm as possible. As it turned out, the only available hand was a rather

elderly gentleman who said he was a good worker. After securing the job, the new hired hand mentioned, “By the way, I sleep through storms.” Now, the farmer was truly at his wits’ end, vowing to confidentially continue his search. His worst fears were borne out. The very next night, a violent storm boiled up. The farmer ran to his hired hand’s house and pounded on the door and walls, all to no avail. Frantic, he dashed to check first on his livestock. They were securely peaceful, locked in their various sections of the barn. Next, he feared for his equipment; the doors were tightly fastened, the equipment without damage. The next morning the farmer expressed his amazement to his new worker. “I like my peaceful sleep, so I prepare before retiring at night.”

This is the preparedness your well thought-out toolbox will provide for your marketing and communications needs.

Public Relations

Technically, public relations refers to non-paid methods of communicating your message. In your industry, one of the most important aspects of public relations is being ready to react in case a newsworthy event occurs on your site. You need to collect the hard questions potential customers or the media might ask. Bring together staff and outside resources to formulate answers. Go through the same process for potential disasters. Be ready to respond, rather than just hoping “it never comes up.” Then, spread the answers company-wide. Are your staff and/or colleagues prepared with the same answers? A document filed away cannot go to work for you. Disseminate the information. You cannot count on the media’s contacting only you or your public relations person. If an incident occurs, the first contact could be made with whomever is available.

Communications and How We Think *Communications*

Content is king. Any copy, brochure, or text you write should reflect the consistency you identified as you formulated your marketing toolbox.

Ideally, frequent readers of your material should recognize the style and presentation. “The tone of a good direct mail letter is as direct and personal as the writer’s skill can make it. Even though it may go to millions of people, it never orates to a crowd, but rather murmurs into a single ear. It’s a message from one letter writer to one letter reader” (Harry B Walsh in Hatch 2007). Do you have a friend who tells you like it is? That’s effective marketing—a conversation between you and one friend.

If your customers aren’t listening to you, who is going to change, you and your communication, or their listening habits? Obviously, you need to speak to each individual in his or her language. Marketing and direct mail writer Denny Hatch (2007) summarizes the underlying key to effective communication this way: THINK.

How We Think

Effective communication depends on reaching the decision-making section of your audience’s brain. Williams (2001) supposes:

- :: You are an advertising message. Your hope is to arrive at the Emerald City, the prefrontal cortex of the human brain, that place where decisions are made in the mind.
- :: But a journey to the Emerald City is both long and difficult. Located just behind the forehead, the prefrontal cortex is isolated from all the parts of the brain that gather information from the outside world.
- :: The good news is there is a Yellow Brick Road, a highway that will take you directly there!
- :: The bad news is the only entrance to the Yellow Brick Road is through a tollbooth called Broca’s Area. Will you be able to pay the toll? “Interest me!” cries Broca. “Surprise me with something I didn’t know. If you’re not carrying new information or a new perspective, you’ll not enter my Yellow Brick Road.”

:: Although it’s positioned next the ear, Broca’s tollbooth screens not just auditory data, but most types of neural information. Sight, sound, taste, pain, pressure, position, movement, and temperature are gathered and processed in various outlying areas of the brain, but all must pass through Broca’s tollbooth on their way to the prefrontal cortex. Sitting in his tollbooth, Broca attaches verbs to actions as he anticipates the predictable. Broca turns away everything that he “sees coming.”

:: Broca hates the predictable.

Now that we have some vital information about the audience, we need to consider a couple of writing principles. Many new copywriters are too effusive. American author Ernest Hemingway described his self-editing as frameline magnetism, “I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show” (Williams 2001).

Copywriting, marketing, and advertising experts have filled bookshelves with different ways to categorize copywriting approaches. It all comes down to what you want to say and how concisely can you do so, compellingly. One relevant description that will give you perspective is, “*You copy, me copy, and it copy.*”

You Copy: found in a letter, a highly emotional, personal message from the writer to the reader that translates the features of the product or service into the benefits to *you, your family, your health, your wealth, and your standing in the community and the world.*

It Copy: the brochure, press release, or E-mail attachment that shows and describes “it”—the features of the product or service being offered.

Me Copy: found in the order or reply device. “Yes, send me the such-and-such under the terms

and conditions described elsewhere in the mailing. I understand that I have two full weeks to make up my mind” (Walter Weintz in Hatch 2007).

Another way to consider crafting your copy is described in the chapter “Principles of Being Perfectly (Robert) Frank” (Williams 2001).

1. Choose a revealing angle. Put the reader/listener/viewer on the scene.
2. Select your details sparingly. Include only what’s interesting. And, barely that.
3. Put the known “under water.” Never tell the reader/listener/viewer anything he already knows or can figure out for himself.

To write *Robert Frank* is to communicate in the fewest words and from the most interesting perspective. It’s how to speak to the left brain with accuracy and clarity without being boring.

Both Hemingway and Frank underscore the effectiveness of your basic message being clearly presented. Ask yourself, “What do I want to say?” Then, say it. You can always add words if necessary. Remember, this information refers to technique; your established style must remain consistent to keep building your image.

To understand the power of reaching Broca’s Area with a concise message, imagine yourself skiing down an intermediate hill. It’s not unusual to come upon a young skier who’s crashed, pieces of ski equipment scattered about his spot in the snow. Responsible skiers yell out, “You okay?” “Yeah,” is the usual embarrassed reply. The shock of, “No,” reaching your Broca’s Area is enough to whip you around, sending you up the hill or into your own crash. In this particular case, the skier actually had a broken leg. Broca was surprised. Broca directed just what you want—action.

Consider the techniques required to communicate effectively. It is clear you will benefit if you buy out the time to plan. Don’t operate on the basis that there’s not time to fully accomplish a task, but there’s always time to do it over because of a crisis.

Customer Service

Good customer service is the gold that keeps your cost-effective customers returning, rather than having to spend 4 to 8 times the cost to obtain a new customer. The biggest marketing mistake made by small businesses is not collecting contacts and customer information, then creating a database. Keep it current. The database gives you a handle on your market.

You can actually write your way to better customer service. Too often, business owners and their employees fail to recognize that the written communications you send can significantly affect how your customers feel, and thus act, about your business.

E-mail and letters that fail to answer your customers’ questions or address their concerns are hard to read, are abrupt in tone, or contain errors all convey the message that you don’t place much value on their business. Poor writing can also cause frustrating misunderstandings that waste valuable time and resources. Ensuring that every E-mail and letter your customers receive is friendly, helpful, and conveys a positive image that your business is a worthwhile investment of your time and money.

Whether you are a small, family company or a large organization, taking the time to establish good writing standards for your company pays off with clarity and consistency.

1. State the main point clearly and quickly. People often read only the first few lines of an E-mail message or letter before deciding whether it’s worth their time. Pay special attention to the subject line, using about 5 words.
2. Respond clearly and directly to a customer’s specific questions and concerns. A customer who has raised a concern isn’t interested in hearing about “how much you value their business” until the concern has been addressed.
3. Use an appropriate tone. Most people are careful not to be rude or abrupt when

speaking to customers on the phone or face-to-face, but sometimes fail to understand their writing conveys a tone. That tone represents you, the company. Never use all capital letters. It's perceived as shouting.

4. Keep sentences and paragraphs short and concise. Proofread for errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Watch out for spell check with words such as "their," and "there" (MelissaDATA 2007).

Keep in touch with current and past customers. It will be illuminating to survey them. First, separate current and past customers, so your information fits into a time frame. If customers are leaving, perhaps you will discover a point at which something changed in your business. Based on MelissaDATA (2007), a summary of questions could include:

1. Why did you buy my product or service?
2. Why did you buy at that specific time?
3. Why did you buy right away, or take your time?
4. What do you like best about my product or service?
5. What do you like least?
6. Would you refer others to me? If not, why not? If yes, why?
7. What specific benefits do you see in my product or service?
8. What specific need of yours does it satisfy?

Word of Mouth (WOM)

Word of Mouth marketing requires that you listen. It can be one of your most powerful tools, as it's the feedback loop that forces marketers—you—to join the conversation. It brings advertisers out of the woodwork and forces them to confront the impact their marketing has on real persons. It puts the consumer at the head of the boardroom table. A happy customer is the greatest advertisement (Sernovitz 2006). Every company can't accomplish this, but if you can become a buzzworthy company, your success is virtually

locked in (Sernovitz 2006). The "buzz" may be about an attribute of your company's business practices, a new product, a marketing campaign, or some other element clearly linked to your company. For example, do you know what company released the iPhone? Of course you do. That's "buzz."

The WOM Manifesto

1. Happy customers are your best advertising. Make people happy.
2. Marketing is easy. Earn the respect and recommendation of your customers. They will do your marketing for you, for free.
3. Ethics and good service come first.
4. UR the UE: You are the user experience, not what your ads say you are.
5. Negative word of mouth is an opportunity. Listen and learn.
6. People are already talking. Your only option is to join the conversation.
7. Be interesting, or be invisible.
8. If it's not worth talking about, it's not worth doing.
9. Make the story of your company a good one. (Many native nurseries are hitching to the "ecologically responsible" theme; be sure to set yourself apart with enticing specific information.)
10. It is more fun to work at a company that people want to talk about.
11. Use the power of word of mouth to make business treat people better.
12. Honest marketing makes more money.

How Do You Implement WOM?

There are 5 basic techniques for implementing WOM (Sernovitz 2006):

1. **Talkers.** Find people who will talk about you (for example, fans, volunteers, customers, bloggers, influencers).

2. **Topics.** Give people a reason to talk (for example, a special offer, great service, cool product, silliness, neat ad, or a new feature).
3. **Tools.** Help the message spread faster and farther (for example, tell-a-friend form, viral E-mail, blogs, handouts, samples, message boards, online communities).
4. **Taking part.** Join the conversation (for example, let staff surf and reply to comments, post on blogs, join discussions, answer E-mail, and offer personal service).
5. **Tracking.** Measure and understand what people are saying (for example, search blogs, read message boards, listen to feedback, use advanced measurement tools).

Are your colleagues or employees your most powerful advocates? Are you asking them to be? Are you making it easy?

1. **Involve everyone.** Your most powerful evangelists aren't in your marketing or PR department. They are the receptionists, the IT folks, the warehouse crews, and the interns. Look for the person wearing the company shirt on weekends. Enthusiasm counts more than titles.
2. **Make it easy.** Arm your employees with everything they need to talk about you. They may effectively use text for the signature files of their E-mails, samples, copy, logos, and photos to paste into their blogs. If your business lends itself to coupons, every employee should have 100 coupons in hand at all times. You pay to put coupons in a newspaper, so why aren't you giving them to people who have a stake in the success of the company?
3. **Go where they already are.** Any method an employee uses to help promote the company is good. It doesn't matter if they want to use MySpace, Facebook, a personal blog, a shirt, or a bumper sticker. Don't make them do it your way. Support whatever method the employee wants to use instead

of recreating or competing with it. You will be shocked at how many of your employees are already on these platforms every day. They are probably holding back and not mentioning work-related topics, because they are not sure how you will respond. Tell them that it's okay and unleash a torrent of advocates.

4. **Make them stars.** Internal rewards are nice, but public recognition is powerful. When employees are out there talking about you, thank them—big time. Put it on your website. Blog about them. Put up their pictures. Create a formal evangelism program so they feel part of the team. Give them hats, shirts, and other toys. For example, the Chicago Bagel Authority restaurant publicly thanks its employees by selling t-shirts, with proceeds going right into the employee tip jar. To make this technique powerful, the customer should see you put the funds into the jar. A sign describing the process is easily disregarded or unbelievably.

5. **Employees should be customers, if appropriate.** Nothing is more embarrassing than employees who don't use their company's products, or walk around with ratty, out-of-date versions. It's a double problem. Your most powerful advocates can't show off to their friends, and their friends instantly wonder what's wrong with your products if even the employees won't use it. That's why Apple gave iPhones to everyone who works there (GasPedal 2007).

Catalog

Your catalog must feel like your website, as much as it can while following the principles of effective print presentation. These 2 tools are the major presentations of your style, image, writing, logo, and identity phrases. If you incorporate direct mail into your marketing scheme, it also dramatically represents your image.

Inform yourself about the direction our eye follows on the page, which is from upper right,

curving through the hot spot at the bottom of the upper one-third of the page, and on to the bottom right. Other questions you need to be able to answer parallel those offered below in the website section.

Repeat your contact information at each point you are asking customers to buy or take other action. Make your expectations clear. What is your “call to action?”

Website

Picking up from the last comment about the catalog, be clear about what action you expect at each stopping point. Have firmly in mind the purpose of your website and specific pages. Is this an informational, motivational, and/or sales site?

When research was conducted about website users’ being able to find information, the importance of the home page was clearly underlined. “It turned out that users were far more successful at finding their targets when the description words, which they told us before they saw the website, appeared on the home page. In the tasks where users successfully found their target content, the description words appeared on the home page 72% of the time. When users were unsuccessful, their words only appeared an average of 6% of the time on the home page (Williams 2001).

To increase sales, your homepage is 50% of the battle. If loading the page goes beyond 30 seconds, you can kiss most of your marketing budget, and all of your first time potential impulse-buyers, goodbye. Designers typically live in a world of T1 lines and broadband connections. The hard reality of the online sales world is that many customers still surf at 56K or slower. In concrete terms, this means your home page should be 35 to 40K.

Other critical website elements to consider include:

1. Is the look and feel professional?
2. Is the navigation obvious, simple, and consistent throughout the website?
3. Is your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) clearly and strongly stated?

4. Is your information architecture constructed from the visitor’s point of view?

5. Does your navigation anticipate and clearly support all reasonable path choices?

6. Does the layout reflect knowledge of eye-scanning patterns and “sweet spots?”

7. Does the choice of page elements reflect knowledge of how visitors use text versus graphics online as opposed to in-print?

8. Are the graphics and the text appropriate, well-chosen, and well-written?

9. Does the page reflect the principles of good usability?

10. Does the page utilize expert sales principles that encourage a buying decision?

11. Does the page utilize knowledge about consumer psychology and the different personality types?

12. Does the page make use of knowledge about online buying behavior?

13. Does the page inspire trust and build rapport? Currently security is more of an emotional issue than a technological one.

14. Is your contact information frequently available and easy to find?

15. Is help available? Is it user-centered versus technology-centered?

16. How many help channels, for example, E-mail, FAX, phone, live-on-web, do you provide?

17. Are the smallest details, such as fonts and colors, chosen with an understanding and knowledge of what maximizes sales?

18. Does the page delight visitors and inspire them to go deeper into the website?

Does it actually guide them in doing so (Eisenberg and Eisenberg 2005)?

What is the most frequent, dangerous misunderstanding about the potential of websites? If it’s there, the customers I’m seeking will find it. A website is a secondary marketing tool. Nearly essential today, yes. But, you need to take action to drive users to your site. If you are seeking a

broad audience, include the address in everything you print. Consumers expect to be able to pick up any piece of paper from your company and find the web address.

Packaging

Product shipping offers a rich opportunity to promote your company, reinforce selection of your product, and sell. The packaging itself should carry your logo and message. You can also be creative with your packing material and include information in the container.

A diesel engine rebuild company enjoyed high sales and very low damage at the receiving end. To streamline their procedures and achieve more sales, they hired a consultant. Many good ideas resulted from that exercise. However, their damage on the receiving end suddenly went from below industry standards to above those standards.

Why? Previously, the shipping department had been including individually wrapped candies among the packing material. Seeing that as an unnecessary expense, the consultant stopped the practice. The bottom line soon became clear. Searching for their candy treats, the customers' receiving department personnel were very careful in unpacking this unwieldy product. The candy was restored; damage statistics dropped again. This was indeed a beneficial case of thinking out of the box.

Direct Mail

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) currently estimates that, in order to generate US\$ 700 billion in sales, marketers will spend US\$ 56 billion on direct mail and catalogs this year. That translates to every US\$ 5.60 in marketing costs bringing in US\$ 70 in sales—a glorious return on investment. The biggest expense is postage. Of that US\$ 5.60, approximately US\$ 1.50 is the cost of paper. If you're concerned about trees, consider that the US has 20% more trees than it had on the first Earth Day celebration more than 25 years ago (Hatch 2007).

Direct mail is accountable. It can be measured. It is an effective method of economically talking to your customers that is guaranteed to reach all of them. The biggest mistake made by small businesses is not building a database of their customers and contacts. You begin by answering that all-important question: Who is my customer? If you can't answer that one, how can you write or design for them?

Having built your database of customers and contacts and kept it up-to-date enables you to decide to use direct mail without a scramble to collect names and addresses. A direct mail professional will help you design your mail pieces that qualify for the lowest possible postal rates. You may or may not need your own Bulk Rate Permit, depending on your mailing frequency and charges by mailers in your area.

How often should you communicate with your customers? You should mail to them a minimum of four times per year. The life of your product influences this number, as do seasonal considerations.

E-mail

Almost 2 million E-mails are sent every second, roughly 171 billion per day, of which 90% are likely to be spam. To make a profit, a spammer needs a return of only 15 responses per million (Hatch 2007). With that kind of success rate, don't look for spam to let up anytime soon. Therefore, you need to be smart about how you use E-mail as a marketing tool.

Pay attention to the subject line. You have about 5 words to get the recipient's attention. A reader will decide within 2 or 3 lines if he or she is going to give you valuable time and thought. Get directly to the point, showing the reader how he or she will benefit from giving you more precious time.

It is essential to assure recipients you will not sell their address and to give them a clear, easy opt-out route. This is not the place to be clever about reader retention.

Trade Shows

If you present at trade shows, do so wholeheartedly. Set goals for contacts. Set goals for the outcome. How will you measure success? Educate those working your booth about your goals and how you want the company message presented. This ensures everyone visiting your booth will receive the same message.

Gather contact lists. One nearly indispensable technique is a sign-up of some kind. Some ask the visitor to leave a business card, while others require a form be filled out. Which would you rather do? Less writing is more powerful. Be sure to provide business card size blank paper for those who forgot theirs, or don't want to dispense so many.

Try your best not to let anyone leave without a "take-away." The more it invokes play, the longer it will be kept and remembered. There are lots of tri-fold brochures. Don't blend into the bottom of the bag or the file at the back of the drawer.

Enthusiastic contact persons are essential. Nothing is more deadly at a trade show than a table across the front of your booth with 1, 2, or 3 tired persons slouching on folding chairs. Stand up. Smile. Two effective booth elements are a front display at an angle, which will drive traffic into your booth and mirrors. We are all attracted to a mirror. It grabs your well-positioned lighting and flashes it into the attention of those in the aisle. You can spend thousands of dollars on booth design and production, but you don't have to do so to be effective. Much depends on expectations you've established for your company. For example, a simple booth from a company such as Sony Electronics would be shocking and disappointing, but not from XYZ Vintage Vegetable Seed Company.

Your booth design must reflect your other marketing tools. This is not the time to wander off the road of consistency. Your logo, colors, style, and so on should be hard at work in your booth design.

The hardest work is after the show. Follow-up on your contacts. Refer to your conversation,

about which you did make notes, of course. Include a comment about their business, which you noted on your contact sheet.

Advertising

Advertising refers to paid messages. Especially effective right now is radio. Write dynamic, streamlined copy that puts the listener in the situation. If you're a smaller company, radio is most useful for retail business, as national buys are costly. Notice, "costly" and "expensive" are not interchangeable. By "expensive" we often mean a lot of money was spent. But actually, it means the return on investment (ROI) was small or negative.

For most companies in attendance at this conference, you can most effectively present your message in print. Geography is a primary consideration. Your target market is grouped by interest, not geography. Print publications overcome the challenge of reaching potential customers who are not co-located.

Repetition is important. It buoys up your image-building. The time to advertise is when you are successful. If you wait until you *need* more business, it is too late to build an image and reputation. Funds may be too short for you to make the huge impact necessary for quick response.

Branding

Branding is listed last because it is the culmination of your effectively employing the appropriate elements previously discussed. People say the word "branding" as though it's a mysterious and complex proposition. But when you peel off all the layers of hype, it comes down to this: if advertising is "getting your name out," then branding is simply "attaching something to your name." A brand is the sum total of all the mental associations, good and bad, that are triggered by a name. What does your name stand for in the mind of the public? What are the mental associations triggered by your company name (Williams 2001)?

Even though it may seem counterintuitive, the simple truth is that the advertiser's message, itself,

is far more important than the vehicle of its delivery. Successful branding depends on your ability to speak to the customer in the language of the customer about what matters to the customer (Williams 2001).

Conclusion

When you can answer the questions above, you know your company. You understand where you are going, and how. Being content with who you are frees you to reach for the stars. Will you succeed by accident? Most “fortunate accidents” are not really accidents at all. They happen as the direct result of hope, faith, and passion. What do you want to make happen? The first step is to see it vividly in your mind. The second step is to cause all those around you to see it just as vividly in theirs. Dreams are highly contagious. What’s yours (Williams 2001)?

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