



ISSUE

Insights on Important Marketing Communications Issues

What Should You Expect from Marketing Communications?

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An often heard question among company owners and managers—especially when budgets are tight—is, “How many sales did that ad or direct mail program or brochure, and so on, generate?”

Although the question *seems* appropriate, when it comes to marketing communications it's the wrong question. Because, as strange as it might sound, the job of a company's marketing communications program is not really to increase sales—at least not directly. Marketing has one objective: to create customers. And the mission of marketing communications is to create an environment so that the customer comes to appreciate the benefits of doing business with your company . . . of purchasing your products or services.

But what about sales?

What about what many consider to be the key issue: making the sale? This is really irrelevant to marketing communications. Marketing communications has everything to do with creating a proper environment so that making the sale is the logical, appropriate, and compelling next step. In other words, the task of marketing communications is to establish a climate so that the sales force can excel in *its* efforts.

4 ways to evaluate your marketing communications

Within this context, then, what kind of results can a company expect from its marketing communications efforts? Following are four ways to evaluate your marketing communications program. And if you're not engaged in an effective marketing communications program, following are four reasons why you should:

1 An effective marketing communications program can differentiate your company and its product or service from the competition. By

far, the most serious criticism a business may have to face is that it looks like every other outfit in its industry. From the customer's viewpoint, there may be little or no way to pinpoint why it is beneficial to do business with one company rather than another. When this happens, of course, the final decision, more often than not, will be based on price.

Looking alike is a killer.

Far too many companies fail to recognize and then emphasize their unique characteristics and the unique characteristics of their product or service. This is a major mistake, since it's your business' special qualities and unique product or service characteristics that make it attractive to both customers and prospects. One way to differentiate your business is by emphasizing your level of expertise and knowledge. Another is to distinguish a product or service benefit your competitors don't—or can't—offer. This is what really sets you apart from everyone else in the field.

2 An effective marketing communications program can create a flow of quality leads. Too often, company executives focus attention on how much marketing communications is going to increase sales. In reality, a proper test is to measure the flow of qualified leads, both currently and over an extended period of time.

Although it may seem obvious, it's easy to forget that leads precede sales. If your sales force is busy following up on qualified leads, sales will naturally increase. However, if your sales people must spend their time locating prospects, trying to get through doors, and making prospects aware of your products and services, then their time will be used prospecting and building awareness, not making sales.

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3 An effective marketing communications program can keep your company in the customer's mind. It's easy to forget the decision-making process that goes on in just about every level of every business. Don't allow the decision-making process to become: When a need arises, whoever comes to mind first gets the business. Although we want to think that even our best customers think of us first, they are probably buying items or services from others.

A primary role of marketing communications is to stay in the customer's mind at all times. Developing programs that reinforce awareness is an essential element of good marketing. How top-of-mind is your company to your best customers and prospects?

4 An effective marketing communications program can be a vital force in customer retention. It is a mistake to harbor the notion that marketing has only to do with picking the fruit off the tree. It has just as much to do

with caring for the fruit that has been picked to make sure it doesn't spoil.

Many times the loss of the business begins at the very moment the first order is signed. It happens subtly, almost imperceptibly; yet customers get that uncomfortable feeling they're not receiving the attention they did when the salesperson wanted their business. Without even recognizing that it's happening, companies allow customer relationships to become dull, empty, and lifeless. A routine sets in that fails to keep the fire alive.

What is marketing communications doing for you?

Clearly, marketing communications is an effective tool for creating and retaining customers. It won't make the sale. That's why you have a sales force. But if you have a product or service that the marketplace needs, marketing communications can help your customers and prospects want it . . . and think of you when they do.

