

## Improving Your Company's Communications

Chances are your company is allocating a significant portion of its marketing budget to communicate a series of very important messages to specifically targeted markets. Gleaned from research and market analysis, these target markets are identified as the most likely to respond to the messages being broadcast. Your company carefully crafts these messages and painstakingly selects communication channels. And yet, somehow, nobody seems to know anything about you. How can this be?

While you understand that communication is important because it raises awareness and creates interest in your products and simultaneously serves to brand your company, there may be telltale signs that your campaign isn't working that you are simply missing. There are a number of challenges your communications campaign may be facing. They are:

### 1. The Message Board is Crowded

There are a number of reasons why the word about your company may not be getting out to the extent that you wish it was. Some of these revolve around the channels you selected to distribute your message. Are your direct mail pieces being read? Are your advertisements placed in the "right" publications? Are any of your press releases being printed? Do you have healthy traffic flow to your website? The answers to these questions, obtained through monitoring and measuring your marketing efforts, should give you sufficient warning (prior to your company becoming obsolete) if your message is not being heard. You need to make adjustments to your mix and your channels, and try to better focus on the both the exposure mechanisms you are employing and the message you are communicating. If your channels are too off the beaten track (perhaps due to budget considerations) you may not be getting the bang for the buck you need because the target market you seek may not be viewing it with sufficient frequency. If this is the case, you need to shift your focus to fewer exposures in better channels. If your message is unclear you might also not be getting through. Make sure you are precise and engaging and make sure you provide a clear message of benefit and purpose.

### 2. There are a lot of Brands Out There

When focusing on branding your company or product there is a tendency to try to gain recognition through repetitive advertising. While placing ads may in fact help create a brand, the core element of branding is not exposure, but rather distinctiveness. You need to create your brand by focusing on why it is different from – and better than – the competition. You need to establish your brand qualities from the very beginning and not hope that customers will assign you a set of attributes after having purchased your product after having their decision driven by advertising. There sure are a lot of brands out there, and the only way to make yours stand out is to – well – make yours stand out.

### 3. There's Never Enough Money for Marketing

Hey, we're marketing guys. In our very souls we agree with this statement. Still, the fact that we can figure out how to blow any size budget, doesn't mean that we don't have to learn how to be effective within the budgets we are provided. In order to do this we need to be both careful in our allocations and accountable for the results. Yes, we agree that

marketing is a process of trial and error and the only way good marketing can be discovered is through a willingness to tolerate some errors. But this does not mean that we are not responsible for those errors. The amount of money you have allocated for your marketing efforts will never be sufficient. You need to create priorities, pinpoint markets, sharpen your message, evaluate your channels, and monitor your results. Once you are engaging in all these activities you will find that while you don't have enough money to satisfy your ambitious objectives, you most likely do have enough money to market your products.

#### 4. None of the Marketing Channels Seem Effective

It may seem this way, but it isn't so. It could be that some of your mix is off, or that you are too heavily centered in one marketing channel. You need to create a mix that allows for the "risk" to be spread across a number of channels. For example you may want to balance out direct mail with public relations and some advertising. The synergies are there because each channel enhances the effectiveness of the other, while the possibility of multiple exposures exists. Alternative channels can also be used, but only once you are established and interested in reinforcing perceptions, not creating them.

The idea that you can communicate better is easy enough to grasp. The methods for doing so are somewhat fundamental in their concept, but more complex in their execution. You need to calculate your message and your channels by basing decisions on verified information. You can insure greater success by monitoring performance. In the end, marketing is all about communication and getting yourself heard above the noise. Sometimes that's accomplished by shouting, and sometimes by getting everyone else to be quiet.