

Launching An Effective Ad Campaign

There is no doubt that advertising should be part of a properly balanced, comprehensive, integrated marketing program. The challenge of course, especially to smaller and mid-size companies, is getting started and managing the advertising campaign so as to maximize results. The array of options, the structuring of the program, the developing of the message, and the monitoring of results are all critical phases that, if handled correctly can allow your company to utilize the power of advertising.

The consequences of a poorly planned and executed ad campaign can range from lost opportunity to wasted money, and in some cases even the alienation of your consumer base. The purpose of advertising is, ultimately, to generate sales (which can be said for every marketing activity), but advertising is unique in that it provides a broader visibility and exposure, and also allows for the relaying of not only information, but also image and emotion.

In contrast to popular notion, the measure of a good advertisement is not how sexy or controversial it is, but rather whether or not it strikes a cord in its intended audience to the extent that it raises their awareness and generates an interest to exercise that most basic of human instincts – the instinct to buy.

The attributes of a good advertisement could be summarized as follows:

- It meets the needs of the consumer in the sense that it provides the information needed to make a buying decision
- It meets the needs of the company by demonstrating a benefit and positioning the company in the market (across from consumers and competitors).
- It is appealing enough to attract attention, perhaps even engaging the consumer through graphics, humor, or a compelling statement.
- It is simple enough for people to understand and appreciate.
- It is focused on one idea, which it communicates clearly.
- It drives the consumer to action.

When to Advertise

Timing is certainly an important aspect of launching an ad campaign, both in the sense of the market's potential receptiveness, but also in terms of your company's readiness to support and maintain the campaign. There are also market indicators that may compel your company to begin advertising, and it is extremely important that you remain aware of the dynamics of your market at all times so that you can, in fact, react and respond accordingly (even though you should be leading the change in dynamics and not merely responding to someone else's moves).

Some overall factors that may indicate the time to advertise has arrived include:

- You have reached the point in your growth cycle that mandates exposing a wider audience to your product or service.
- You discover (through research) that your product or service is misunderstood or under valued.
- You realize your competitors (who do advertise) are threatening to dominate the market – and even perhaps eat away at your market share.

- Your sales have slowed and you need to regenerate enthusiasm for your company or its products (or services).

Identifying when you are ready to advertising is critical, yet the time that elapses from the moment of realization to the moment of implementation can result in a loss of valuable time. That's why it's always worthwhile to have a well considered preliminary advertising plan prepared way before you intend to begin advertising. This way, when the market conditions shout "time to advertise", you need only to make slight adjustments.

Developing a Plan

Tudog takes a very road approach to advertising, very much as we do to all matters of marketing. Tudog believes the planning of an advertising plan begins not with channel options or even development of message, but deeper down in the soul of the company. Before a company can consider what message it wishes to communicate and to which market it wishes to communicate to, it needs to understand its purpose, benefit, mission and vision.

Once you have undergone your soul searching, you should then review how you currently communicate with your market. You should take a look at all your brochures, website, and other materials and determine whether the message and image communicated has been serving you well (and will continue to). You may decide you require a slight (or perhaps dramatic) new look and message, which will then carry over to your advertising. It is simpler to make these adjustments on the collateral material level, as opposed to the advertising level.

After you have completed these two phases, you can begin to focus on your actual advertising plan, which includes careful consideration of the following elements:

- Who will be the target market?
- What message will you communicate?
- What image is required (to support the message)?
- What channels of marketing (print, radio, television, signs, mailers, web) will you be using? (you should always use more than one channel).
- What degree of frequency is needed to gain the exposure and recognition being sought?
- What duration (for the campaign) is required to achieve the objectives?

These should be treated as strategy issues, not budget issues. If the budget is not there, the adjustment can come afterward. But first, you need to develop a budget.

Developing a Budget

Getting your budget set is a somewhat complex exercise because there are a number of variables that differ from market to market. In most cases a company will assign a portion of its marketing budget (often derived as a percentage of revenue) to advertising. Then the type of advertising becomes a function of budget, not part of a strategic advertising plan. Naturally, the resources will ultimately determine where your ads are placed, but the strategic step needs to come first so you can evaluate potential return. For example, if for some reason you conclude that your company requires advertising on

television yet your budget permits only ¼ page ads in a neighborhood newspaper, you may conclude that the funds placed on the ads in the local newspaper would be wasted, as the channel available does not serve the strategic objective. Naturally, we are being a bit absurd here to emphasize a point, which is; you need to make sure your strategic objectives match your capacity to act on them, and that, when it comes to advertising, you need to make sure your objectives are being served.

The cost of advertising differs from channel to channel, market to market and even time and frequency. When constructing your budget, refer back to your plan and the needs expressed and determine what resources are needed.

How to Monitor Results

Monitoring the results of your advertising activities can be somewhat complex, depending on the degree to which you incorporate measurement friendly components. For example, an advertised sale or special allows you to measure response because you can quantify the number of responses. However, this is oversimplified and could lead to a misunderstood of the efficacy of your program (as the attractive of the sale could result in an improved view of the market's general response to your typical ads).

The measurement of ads can also come from a general improvement in sales, which indicates that more people are hearing about your product (raised awareness) and are purchasing it (created interest).

The final way to measure your ad campaign is by going back into the market and calculate the status of your company's image and position, as well as consumer perception. If the market position is improved, and the message you are communicating matches consumer perception, then you are getting through.

Launching an advertising campaign can be an exciting moment in a company's cycle of growth. Implementing it in a measured and considered manner helps enhance the process and produce more effective results.