

Strategy vs. Tactics

I came across this blog post from copywriter Tim Brunelle regarding tired tactics, and how sometimes strategy is ignored. That got me thinking about the topic. Usually each piece of marketing material is a tactic: the brochure, the press release, even the website. Hopefully, each piece is guided by a strategy.

If you are launching a marketing campaign, it should never start with “we’ll run an ad.” It should start with figuring out who you want to reach, where those people are located and what you want them to do with the information you want to share with them.

A few months ago, a potential client contacted me. He wanted me to write copy for an ad. He was about to open up a new business and wanted to promote it. My first thought was “wait a second, what?.” I asked him who his target audience was. He told me. I asked him where this ad would run. He told me he thought it should run in one of those free newspapers so common on the subway. I asked why. His reasoning was lots of people read that (true) and the cost is relatively low (true). But what this guy was missing completely was a strategy, a vision, a long term plan. Sure, running a “cheap” ad in a mass publication could promote your business. But spending a few dollars here and few dollars there does not further your purpose and it certainly does not strengthen your brand. In fact, you have to think about the larger picture to create a brand personality and make sure that you are not hurting yourself with some misplaced tactics.

People are sold tactics by ad sales reps because those reps are there to sell advertising now and not to tell you how to create a brand image for yourself. Many times, small businesses fall into this trap. The local paper will call and tell them they are running a special and so forth. It sounds

reasonable. And boom, a tactic is launched which may or may not have something to do with your larger strategy.

Save yourself some marketing dollars and think of each tactic as a piece of the marketing strategy puzzle. Instead of blindly following some promotion because it is inexpensive, figure out whether that furthers your overall goals.

JetBlue sells out ... in a good way

Did you hear about JetBlue's unlimited pass? For \$599 you can go anywhere during a month. You probably already heard about it, but now you can no longer get the pass because it is sold out. That's right, in just about a week, JetBlue was able to create so much demand that it was able to sell out. To me, that is the definition of a great marketing campaign.

Why is this such a great marketing campaign? For many reasons:

- First and foremost it **sold product**, in this case, seats on planes.
- It was **creative** and different from most airline promotions. It caused JetBlue to stand apart.
- Its creativity created buzz, and loads of **publicity**. Google is telling me that there were at least 226 articles about the promotion, and 50 articles about the selling out.

JetBlue has tapped into something customers want: lower cost air travel. But it's not all about being cheap—Spirit Airlines is also cheap, but it does not offer the same experience. JetBlue is comfortable, offers snacks, TV in each seat, and

it's generally a good experience. But it also distinguishes itself for being cutting edge. JetBlue has embraced Twitter by offering their "cheeps" (travel promotions). And its tries hard to provide good customer service.

It is a really good day in marketing when a promotion reaches its target while generating front page news, all for a comparatively low marketing dollar investment.

Why a thank you is good marketing



Thank you for reading this post, and thank you for reading my

blog. I probably haven't thanked you before, so I apologize, because this post is about how thank you is really a marketing tool.

We've all heard of customer appreciation. Often, it is a deal available to new customers. Sometimes it is a gift with purchase. In many cases, the customer has to do something additional to get appreciated—sign up for a new service or buy more.

What about customers that just use a service, like a gym, cable, phone and have been using it for years. Do they ever get thanked? No, they often don't. Why? Because companies take the bulk of their customer base for granted. They imagine that if they are providing the service, and there is no problem, the customer will remain loyal. But in fact, customers are not always loyal. They will switch for lower prices, or better service. They may also switch because a company does not seem to appreciate they have a choice in service providers. This is why more banks and customer service agents start any conversation with you by saying things like "thank you for banking with us."

The bottom line is that saying thank you is about expressing appreciation. And most everyone likes to be appreciated. And yet, thank yous are sometimes hard to come by.

In your personal marketing or personal branding, saying thank you may be even more important. Think about it: What are you saying when you don't say thank you? You are communicating that you are uninterested, unappreciated, or that you take the gesture for granted. It makes you seem rude and self-involved. Some people will claim they are too busy to respond. Are you too busy to make sure that you are perceived properly?

Remember, no one is forced to be your customer unless you are a monopoly. And no one is required to help you out unless he

or she wants to. It is simple to say thank you. Saying thank you boosts the perception that you care, that you are aware that what the customer or friend has given you has some value.

New business: marketing essentials

If you are a new business, or a small business, or any business at all, there are a couple essentials for your marketing. I am assuming you already have a business name and have done all the necessary paperwork to get yourself set up.

The number one item you need is a website. Buy your own domain. If you can't afford a fully designed website you can use templates through vendors such as Network Solutions or Go Daddy. If you are more technologically inclined, you can use WordPress, but host it at your domain name. Your website, at minimum, should answer these questions: who are you, what do you do, why should anyone hire you or purchase your product, how to reach you. If you are a restaurant or deal with the public, include your hours and directions to your location. Remember, this is a minimum. If you are a restaurant, you could also include menus. Service businesses could include case studies, client lists, testimonials.

The number two item you need is business cards. You can get them for cheap or you can have them professionally designed. Whatever you do your business cards should have your name, primary phone, website URL and email address (preferably at your domain).

If you have money or a good friend who is a graphic designer, get a logo and letterhead package done.

Once you are set up, you may consider developing a tagline or a slogan for your business. Use it on everything.

These are the essentials. There are plenty of other marketing communications collateral materials you could develop for yourself, including brochures, ads, press releases, white papers and so forth. You also have to think about your social media strategy: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn for starters.

Start with the essentials. Work from there.

If you want help figuring out what marketing materials you need, contact me.

Interest and Julie & Julia

Last night I saw the movie Julie & Julia, about Julia Child and Julie Powell. Julie Powell wrote a book about her experience blogging about cooking her way through Child's Mastering the Art of French Cooking. I liked the movie and would recommend it, especially if you enjoy food and want to feel inspired.

But this is not a movie review blog, it is about marketing communications. And here's the thing: the movie has stimulated the sales of Julia Child's books, biographies and of course, of Julie Powell's Julie & Julia. In fact, there is a renaissance in interest in all things Julia Child. This is probably due to Meryl Streep's excellent personification of Julia on screen and a compelling storyline about following your dreams and believing in yourself.

The marketing lesson to draw from the success of Julie and Julia is that interest stimulates action. It goes back to the

AIDA principle we have discussed before: attention, interest, desire and action. If you make something interesting, you will stimulate action on the part of your intended target audience. The movie made all things Julia and Julie interesting. The audience was loving the food, and now, naturally, wants to partake in it. The audience was inspired to learn more about Julia (and Julie for that matter).

Movies are great marketing vehicles because they reach mass, captive audiences. This is why we see so much product placement in the movies, and why there is advertising at the movie theater. A good movie is by nature, interesting. If it has to do with a historical figure, we want to learn more. If it showcases music (like Walk the Line did for Johnny Cash), you want to go out and listen to the music again.

The other lesson is to put things in front of the right audience. In Julie & Julia's case, the thing is both cooking and following dreams, for a female audience. Last night, I would say that 90% of the audience was female, and I would venture to say that most were under 45.

In any case, Julie & Julia reached its intended audience and is proving that people always want to know more if they are stimulated to do so.

Did you see the movie? What did you think?

**Can you succeed in
communications without new**

media?

It's hard to remember what communications was like back even a decade ago. When I started in advertising, we faxed insertion orders and delivered artwork. When I started in PR, we faxed press releases and mailed photos. Now, we all just use the Internet. In the past two or three years, we've evolved past email and launched into new media: blogs, Twitter, social networks, and so forth. "Old" media is dying a bit more every day. Newspapers are disappearing or slimming down. News broadcasts are relying on Twitter and Facebook for user interaction. We've become a nation of citizen journalists, wielding our cameraphones and uploading our viewpoints. I read somewhere that a large liquor advertiser will be spending 90% of its ad budget on new media. On the other hand, a study showed that 60% of Americans use print media to make shopping decisions.

In any case, there is a new paradigm in how people acquire information. Fewer people are turning to traditional media and more people are turning to new media. That is the reality and your communications efforts must reflect that.

A few days ago, I was having a conversation with a graphic designer. He's pretty old school, to such an extent, that although he has worked in web design, he had never heard of WordPress. I spoke with a technical writer who knows nothing about blogs, and dismissed them as useless. Do you think these people are ready for the present, not to mention the future? In my opinion, they will be left behind.

I believe that if you are in communications, you must learn about new media. You may not use it, but you need to know about it. People are making lots of money training other people on how to use blogs and Twitter for communications efforts. In fact, for a mere \$395 you can go to an all-day Twitter conference. Why would people spend this type of

money? Because we are looking to know what the next big thing will be. In the early 90s, glossy magazines were the big thing. In the early 00s, dot-com/websites were the rage. Now we are in the blogosphere.

In a sense, communications is way more challenging now than ever. We have a very segmented audience and extremely targeted media. I am not sure we have much left in the way of mass media. Communications practitioners have to become adept at many forms of media.

So, to answer my own question, no, you cannot succeed in communications without new media.

What do you think?

The best marketing

The best marketing is positive word of mouth, no doubt about it. Think about it: If a trusted friend raves about something or someone, you are more likely interested. Even if your friend just gives you a name without a rave, you are more likely to check it out.

Companies do not seem to grasp the importance of positive word of mouth and instead rely on expensive ad campaigns. Take Comcast for instance. They spend mucho dinero on all sorts of print and broadcast messages, but everyone knows someone who has had a bad customer service experience with Comcast. In fact, Comcast probably NEEDS to spend that much money to overcome all the negative reviews out there.

On the other hand, no company should rely solely on word of mouth. For instance, near me there is a pizza shop. It is

always jammed at lunch, which is a good indicator. However, the store does not list its hours. It doesn't have a website, or provide menus, or have flyers in the local coupon book. Unless you are in the know it seems, you don't know.

What are your thoughts?

Customers don't want work

Work to find out who you are, is what I mean.

Yesterday, I was perusing the various coupons in the ValPak mailing. Along with the usual assortment of restaurant discounts and bathroom re-fitter ads, there was a simple coupon for \$10, \$15 or \$20 off (depending on the amount of purchase) at Finish Line. I am pretty certain Finish Line is a sporting goods store, but short of their website URL, there was no other information. No tag line. No locations. Nothing other than a logo with what could be interpreted as a runner, that would indicate what this store is. In fact, for all I knew, it's online only.

I went to the Finish Line website and discovered they are indeed an athletic equipment purveyor. They are located in many states, so perhaps that explains the lack of specificity in the ad.

Here's a note to the Finish Line marketing department: customers don't want to work to figure out why they should patronize your store. It is YOUR job to tell them. For sure, give them your Web address, but don't expect them to visit without a reason.

There was no headline or tagline on the ad. And unless you

were familiar with Finish Line, the simple enticement of money off is not going to attract you unless it is something that you want to buy.

In any case, this is an example of narcissism in marketing. Everyone knows who I am therefore I don't have to tell them. There are a few brands that can do that—Coke, Pepsi, McDonalds. But Finish Line is not one of those brands.

Ads need to motivate customers to buy. That is the intent. A savings coupon for something I don't know I want is not going to do the trick.

Product shots, headlines, taglines are all used in advertising for a reason. You know?

What's it all about?

This post is about “about” pages. You know, the pages that describe your organization. On blogs, the about pages gives a sense to visitors who the author is. I would say this is crucial information. It helps us judge the trustworthiness of the content. Say that I am a student of public relations, at the PhD level, and I say so on my about page. You may surmise that my content has a scholarly bent based on my research. However, say that I am a student, in high school. And I write about public relations. You may conclude that I am still learning and that my blog is an attempt to explore social media.

I have come across many blogs lacking an about page. That is a mistake. A big mistake. Your about page does not have to be long and fancy. Just tell me who you are and what you are doing. That's it. Use it to build your credibility.

Just today I came across this blog: <http://prnext.wordpress.com/> It purports to be a monthly ezine about PR. It gives some rather dubious advice and info (like PR took a backseat to advertising in the 90s, really? says who?). In any case, I want to know who is behind the blog, and guess what, the about page is blank. Immediately, I think these people do not know ANYTHING about PR if they don't even have any basics about themselves. So, their credibility is challenged.

Take a look at your blog, your website, your LinkedIn. What have you done in the about sections? Have you communicated who you are and what you do, at the very least?

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So, did the celebrity make you buy it?

William Shatner pitches Priceline and Catherine Zeta-Jones represents T-mobile. They are just two of the many celebrities that are paid big bucks to endorse a product or appear in advertising for the product. The question really, is does it work? I think it works to gain attention but not necessarily to stimulate sales.

There was a poll, sponsored by Adweek, on LinkedIn, to see if celebrities make people likely to buy a product or not. The overwhelming response (78%) was that it made no impact at all. You can access the poll [here](#).

Are you swayed by celebrity?