

Advertising is not enough

Say you want to sell something. You think: I'll place an ad to get buyers. Buyers will come, see the item and pay for it. Deal done. For simple transactions, this simple paradigm works. Take note of all the individual ads for used furniture, bikes and other stuff on Craigslist.

However, there must be more thought put in when you are trying to market for a large store, retail operation or national distributor. First, you are selling more than one item. When you are advertising for a larger operation you are trying to accomplish at least two things. One is to move product and another is to get people in your store. The idea being that if someone is there to buy 2-for-1 widgets, he or she may also buy some gadgets.

So your ad agency created a great ad, the pricing is great both for the customer and for your bottom line, and you've done a comprehensive media buy. All you have to do now is sit back and wait. Right? Wrong!

Retailers, from the smallest to the largest, have to be a bit more proactive. First, they have to make sure they have enough stock of what they are attempting to sell. Second, they have to have contingency plans if the demand is too large. Are you going to honor the same price when a new shipment arrives? Are you going to give rainchecks?

In short, advertising must be connected to your operations and customer service policies.

Let me share a misadventure I had at a well known office supply store (email me if you want the name). They had advertised a certain desk chair on sale. On the second day of the sale, I showed up at a store and wanted to buy said desk chair. The store was "out of stock." In fact, most every store in the area was out of stock. I had to ask the manager

to locate stores with the chair in stock and both had only one chair. At no point did he offer to call and have the other store hold the chair for me. The manager also did not offer to give me a coupon or the same price on a similar chair. In fact, the whole experience was illustrative of terrible customer service, but also of the disconnect between advertising and operations.

The store had advertised a sale for an item that it did not have in stock. Perhaps it was bait and switch and perhaps it was the fault of the advertising manager. Whatever the reason, it did not result in a sale, quite the opposite, it resulted in an irritated potential customer who will think twice before going to this store for anything, much less anything advertised in the weekly circular.

Advertising gets people to the door but it does not make the sale. Customer service and sales staff make the sale.

The truth is advertising alone is rarely enough.

It's not you, it's me

Have you ever wondered why some ads work and some don't? Some ads don't work because they are missing crucial information or they are too convoluted or weird. Some ads just don't stimulate interest or excitement. And some ads miss their target completely by being placed in the wrong medium.

Yes, sometimes, it is the marketing effort that is to blame. Sometimes the creativity wasn't there or the strategy was not the best.

But (of course there is a but), sometimes it is what you are

selling, your offer, that is to blame. In other words, your marketing is fine but your offer is not.

Many times I get dozens of emails advertising an event. The event is posted everywhere. All the correct information is there. Perhaps there is a great headline. But the date conflicts with something else. But the price is too high. But you just bought something similar. **The offer is off.**

Sometimes, what you are offering is not what the customer wants.

For instance, a local marketing association is having an event about LinkedIn. Another organization in town had a similar event just a few weeks ago. Furthermore, the event costs \$60. It is too much for me. There was nothing wrong with the marketing for the event except the offer didn't entice me (in this case it was the cost).

If you are failing to bring in people to your event or buyers to your store, examine your offer. Is the offer fair? Is the offer special? Do people like the offer? Don't blame your marketing until you make sure you have a good offer.

Sometimes you have to think, it's not you, it's me.

Do you have examples of an ad with a bad offer? Please share!!!

Propaganda

Last night, I was fortunate to visit a magnificent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, entitled State

of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda.

As the curator explained, propaganda is inherently linked with advertising and public relations. In the beginning of modern advertising and PR, propaganda people were running the show. Edward Bernays, the “father of modern PR” was a propagandist. But propaganda is not inherently negative. Propaganda is simply the propagation of an idea, using various means.

Unfortunately, as with Hitler and the Nazis, propaganda has been used to propagate evil and incite violence and murder. It is a testament to the power of propaganda that the Holocaust was as widespread and supported as it was.

The Nazis understood the power of mass media, and they understood the power of symbolism and word choice. They understood that you had to dehumanize your enemy. They used words that had emotional appeal to the Germans of the day, like “freedom.”

The Nazis made radios cheaper and widely available, and then proceeded to use radio as a way to send out their propaganda within music shows. It became illegal in Nazi Germany to listen to foreign radio broadcasts, punishable by long imprisonment. So the way propaganda worked within Nazi Germany was to use all media possible and by the suppression of all opposing viewpoints.

In any case, the lesson to learn is that words are powerful. We that work in the promotion business, be it advertising, PR or marketing have the power to persuade and that is not something to be taken lightly.

What does the folding of Gourmet and Modern Bride mean?

Yesterday came the news that Conde Nast will be folding its long running and popular publications Gourmet and Modern Bride. A few other magazines are also ceasing publication, resulting in more people being laid off at Conde Nast. The reason? Decline in both ad sales and circulation.

What does it mean?

It means that print is on its last legs. With advertising down across the board, and people abandoning print for various reasons (cost, environmental concerns, can get content online), I see a not-so-distant future where there will be no print magazines at all. The costs to print will outweigh the revenue generated, as was the case with Gourmet and Modern Bride.

Even with loyal readers, quality content and a weighty history, Gourmet will print its last issue in November. For now, C-N plans to keep printing Bon Appetit. Modern Bride's last issue is the current one. Brides will up its printing to monthly. Mergers in the print world mean less choice for advertisers. We may see ad prices jump. And then, will advertisers stick with print? Doubtful.

What are your thoughts?

A reason to buy (plus photographs)

Perhaps I should have titled this blog post “Back to Basics,” because it is all about hitting the essential notes. When marketing anything, you need to show the potential buyer why he or she would want to buy something. Seems fairly obvious. And yet, how many times have you seen products advertised for which there is no clear reason given that would cause buyers to buy?

I got the following anecdote from Sara Cormeny (who is a web developer at www.paperlantern.com.)Please note I edited slightly:

I just recently purchased a product on Amazon called the Standers Bed Cane, for my dad. It's a handle that you attach to the side of your bed, in order to have something secure and sturdy to hold onto as you get in and out of bed.

For people who are still having a hard time convincing a parent to get one, I noticed that they have cleverly added an organizer pouch, useful for holding glasses, the remote control, a pen, etc. More than one of the Amazon user reviews mentioned that her mom was willing to consider the Bed Cane because she actually thought the organizer was worth it, even if she insisted that she didn't need one of those cane-assists.

I thought it was really clever that the makers added this to the product – now it appeals to both parties who are likely to be involved in the buying process, and lets the user save face with a product that screams “old lady who can't get in and out of bed on her own.”

I was also impressed that the seller included five photos

of the product, which were clearly taken and showed it in use with a person in the bed, in a close-up attached to the bed without a person, and two photos of it removed from the bed so you could see all the parts and see it folded up for storage. For me, all the photos made it so much easier to understand how it would work and how it would fit with my parents' bed, and that was really what sold me (along with the competitive price)."

What Sara is pointing is that there should be COMPELLING reason to buy and also proof, in the way of pictures, that the product serves the purpose. Any marketing should include these basics. Advertising and marketing should not always leave everything to the imagination. Being clear and transparent is often the way to go (more on this on my next post).

Thoughts? Have you bought something because the photographs made it clear how the product worked?

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?

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?

Random thoughts

Radio Commercials

Does it seem to you that every time you are listening to the radio, and a commercial break comes on, you get commercials on all other stations as well? Does it also seem to you that commercial breaks/DJ gab fests on radio go on for way too long?

It's great that there is still so much advertising on radio, but I think that by making the commercial breaks so long radio stations risk losing their listeners. If I am listening to station, and a long commercial break comes on, I switch stations until I find one that is playing music. If these breaks were shorter, there would be less risk of alienation, IMO.

Different name, same location

Why is it that store owners think that by changing the name of a store they will get tons of new business? I was just walking home and saw that a day spa/salon just changed their name (and

to something a lot more utilitarian). I thought, well, the problem was not the name of the salon, it is the location! Hard to get to, off the beaten path, etc. I don't know if the salon was sold to another owner, but in any case, when I see too many names on the same store front I tend to think problems.

As if we thought Iran was democratic

I am not sure why Iran bothered to hold elections. Why pretend they are a democracy? Let me point out that the actual leader of Iran is not the president but the Ayatollah, the so-called Supreme Leader. Anytime you have someone ruling a country who is not elected and calls himself the Supreme Leader you are not dealing with a democracy. The problem is that the west wanted to believe that elections=democracy. They do not. It is not good marketing for Iran to hold elections and then repress the protests when it appears the election is a sham. Talk about a public relations fiasco!

The answer to your marketing needs

I recently read that to get leads for your business, white papers are the answer. (For those that don't know, white papers are backgrounders, in-depth write ups about a subject area.) For one second I thought, yeah! that is the answer and I was about to put it on my to-do list. But wait, I thought, there is never ONE answer to marketing. That is the magic bullet thinking that gets lots of people in trouble.

Marketing should be about using a mix of strategies and tactics that can promote your service or product to its target

audience. For instance, say you are marketing denture paste. You could advertise in the AARP magazine (if the budget allows) or in a local seniors newspaper. You could sponsor an event targeting those 65+. You could do many things, but you wouldn't necessarily advertise in Blender Magazine or choose a skateboarding teen as your spokesperson. You have to go where your target audience goes.

So, my advice to you is that if someone tells you that to market your business, all you need to do is this one thing, walk away. Walk away fast. There is never a one-size solution nor any kind of magic bullet. Marketing is about creating awareness and that can take time and many forms.

I had a client once who was looking for the magic bullet. So, he hired me to re-do some copy, and he hired a PR guy to get some publicity, and he redesigned his website. He thought that each thing he did would bring a huge influx in business. And none of it did. Sure he got a better website, and good publicity, but because nothing was strategic and everything was a quick response to I need to get more business, it didn't work. And he kept wasting money wanting to find the one thing that would work instead of working on many different tactics that would give his brand cohesiveness. I could never make that client happy because one piece of copy or one press release is not going to turn you into a million dollar business.

A couple of nights ago, I was watching CNBC and they had a show entitled The Oprah Effect. As you no doubt know, anything that is seen on Oprah, almost automatically becomes a bestseller. You may think then that Oprah is a magic bullet. Well, yes and no. It does get you tremendous exposure, but in order to get on Oprah, you have to have a good product, good marketing and a good story. Those are part of the marketing mix. You also have to be ready to play in the big leagues. What if you can't deliver? Then your business is going down the tubes.

In sum, stop looking for one solution and look at the whole picture. What do you need to do to give yourself a marketing boost?



Are you hosting an event?

When you host an event, you want people to attend, right? If you don't think so, just ignore this post.

So, how do you get people to attend your event? It may seem self evident, but many organizations do not follow these promotional tips:

0) Before you start, be sure to have all the following info for inclusion: title and purpose of event, date of event, hours of event, exact location and directions to event, cost, contact information, whether you need to RSVP or not (and who the RSVP contact is). You would be surprised at how many invitations miss some of this critical data.

1) Invite people. Be sure to send out an invitation to all members, interested parties, people who have attended your events in the past, etc.

2) Post the event on your website or blog or both. Ask a third party to check and see if you have included all necessary information.

3) Send a calendar item listing to your local newspaper, event aggregator, tv station.

4) Include in your newsletter. If it is an annual event, add to your signature line on email and include on all

communications, internal and external.

5) Remind people. There are many events competing for people's attendance, so be sure to send reminders. This is where social media like Twitter could be useful.

6) Create an event page on Facebook or other social media sites.

7) To be really efficient, you may want to use an electronic event management database to help you to keep track of attendees, send out invites and take RSVPs. Two that come to mind are Cvent and EventBrite.

A note about timing: You want to give people enough time to plan to attend, but not too much time so that they may forget about the event. Perhaps you can invite three to four weeks in advance, and remind people two weeks and one week before the event.

Again, the most important thing about publicizing an event is to provide all the information somebody would need to attend the event. Don't take this for granted. I can't tell you how many events I have seen listed that lack basic info such as DATE!

If I have overlooked anything, please remind me in the comments!

