

ADVERTISING AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES

RSW is a marketing communications firm that helps organizations unify their internal and external communications to deliver a more powerful, consistent brand message that both their employees and customers can embrace.

This white paper is one in a series that are offered free of charge to marketing professionals. Each title in the series deals with a specific area of concern, and is designed to give you solid, tactical advice on finding effective ways to communicate with your employees and your customers.

We've purposely avoided the standard industry jargon, catch-phrases, and buzzwords that seem to clutter most marketing documents. The result is a series of papers that are refreshingly brief, rich in content, and easy to consume.

We hope you enjoy this paper. To find out more about what RSW can do for you, please call Brad Wines at 214-528-1818, or email us at info@rswcreative.com.

If you're involved in the advertising and marketing of your company, there are a few things that you're probably aware of.

You've probably noticed that a lot of the marketing and advertising in your industry tends to look alike.

You've often wondered how effective it is.

You've also noticed that only a handful of companies tend to produce marketing and advertising materials that actually set them apart from the crowd.

And you've no doubt realized that in recent years, the landscape in which you compete has gotten more crowded, competitive, and cluttered.

How can you make your message heard in such an environment?

Reading this is a good start. In the next few pages, you'll find thirteen simple ideas that have the power to make your marketing efforts more distinctive and successful.

This white paper was produced expressly for clients and potential clients of RSW, a marketing communications firm that helps companies build stronger brands inside and out. We hope you enjoy it — and profit from it.

1. It Is Always Helpful to Know Why You Are On this Planet.

That's the first thing your customers want to know about you: "Why do you exist?"

"Are you going to make my life easier? Are you going to let me do things faster? Are you going to cut costs for me or help me bill more? Will I get to go home earlier or sleep easier? What are you going to do for me?"

Surprisingly, the majority of companies in America have not taken the time to pinpoint exactly why they exist in terms of the core benefit they bring to their customers. And even fewer enunciate this clearly and concisely in their advertising and marketing efforts.

If you're not communicating the points mentioned above in a clear and concise way, you are failing to communicate the one thing that potential customers want most to know about you: "Why do you exist?" Or, in the terms your customers would use, "Why should I do business with you?"

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Many companies formulate things such as mission statements and brand messaging but do not ingrain them into their organizations; the messaging merely sits in a drawer or binder somewhere. As a result, their employees, ads, and marketing materials send hazy or conflicting messages about who they really are.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Define your mission and your brand messaging. Make it clear and concise so that it can be summed up in a couple of sentences. Then ingrain it throughout your organization. Make sure, in particular, that every marketing, sales, and customer service person can recite your message and name the 2 – 3 things that define your brand. And make sure they appear constantly and consistently in your advertising, marketing materials, and PR releases.

2. People Speak Plain English. Your Advertising Should, Too.

Yes, your audience is well-educated.

But they are also busy. They're tired. They're overworked. They're swamped with more important things to do than read your materials. Which is why you should speak to them clearly. Concisely. Simply. In plain English.

In addition to increasing the readership of your marketing materials, clear communication provides a major key benefit to you: It forces you to notice whether or not you are actually communicating something of value. It's easy to obscure a good idea or disguise a weak one in overly complex language. But with plain English, a good idea — or lack thereof — becomes frighteningly and undeniably clear.

There's also a secondary benefit: By eliminating the endless stream of increasingly small details, you free yourself up to focus on what is really important: convincing your audience, in frank and simple terms, that you have the best overall solution to the specific situations they face.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Generating marketing materials that are overloaded with details but that are possible to understand — if the reader tries.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Generating marketing materials that deal with the big picture and that are impossible to misunderstand — whether the reader tries or not.

3. *It Is Impossible to Be Different By Being the Same.*

Let's have a moment of brutal honesty. Each industry is unique. And its players all have their own specific attributes. But when you look at how they present themselves in the marketplace, most firms in any given industry look strangely the same.

You've seen the websites. You've been to the trade shows. And you've been inundated with the relentless "sameness" of it all: Extreme close-up photos of high-tech components. Pictures of people at conference tables shaking hands. Busy executives with smart phones and lap top computers. Generic headlines touting things like "quality" and "state-of-the-art."

Oh. One more thing: This isn't just a good idea, it's a necessity. Why? Because in the world we live in now, the average person is exposed to over 3000 advertising and marketing messages a day. You have two and only two options:

Be different — or go unnoticed by the vast majority of people.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Developing advertising and marketing materials that use images that are similar to those used by everyone else in your industry.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Developing an approach that visually sets your advertising and marketing materials apart from the other players in your industry. The objective: After seeing 100 marketing messages, a person may remember two or three of them. Your job is to be one of them. And it all begins by doing something that is relevant, memorable — and different.

4. *When Given a Choice Between Being Boring and Being Interesting, Be Interesting.*

This is a point that seems so obvious that we're almost embarrassed to say it.

But stop and think a minute: When was the last time you actually read a marketing copy that was interesting? That was a pleasurable or enlightening experience? That made you stop and read? One that made you smile or think? That made you change the way you think?

To be honest, it happens so infrequently that when you actually come to an interesting message, you notice it. You remember it. You enjoy it. You learn from it.

And you begin to like the company who produced it a little more.

That's exactly what you should strive for in your marketing materials.

The bottom line is simple: You cannot bore someone into doing business with you. But you can interest them in doing business with you.

When people like your marketing materials, they're more likely to believe them. They're also more likely to like your company. And that, in a nutshell, paves the road to higher sales.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Strive to develop communications that your CEO and product developers will find interesting.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Strive to develop communications that your CEO and product developers — and their parents, kids, secretaries, baby sitters, and customers — will find interesting.

5. Be Brief and Effective.

Your audience is busy.

You have a point to make.

Make it.

Then move on.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

In advertising their products and services, companies tend to make one of two mistakes. One group embraces brevity — and proceeds to keep things so brief that they fail to communicate the benefit of their product or service. The other tries to be overly thorough, and in the process becomes so wordy that they lower readership.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Find the best possible balance between brevity and effective communication. According to Cahners, the highest recall ads tend to be 100 – 200 words in length. Our supposition is that this is because most short ads fail to communicate a memorable message, and longer ones tend to discourage readership. Our own personal recommendation: Try to achieve effective and relevant communication with an intriguing concept, and do it within 60 – 120 words.

6. The Most Valuable Thing You Manufacture Isn't Your Product.

In the long run, your brand identity is the most important thing you will ever manufacture. If your marketing and advertising are focused on selling your product without building your brand, you will be forever doomed to re-create the wheel

every time you go to market. Why? Your product line will continually change, evolve, and upgrade.

But your brand name is eternal. Start viewing it for what it is: the most important product your company produces. In the final analysis, your products come and go. The entity that your customers have a relationship with is not your widgets. It's your company. Your brand. If you sell them on your brand, their purchase of products will follow.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

To produce communications which give the details of a product or service but not the core essence of who your company is and what it stands for.

THE BEST PRACTICE

To produce communications which express the benefit of your product or service and state how that is an extension of who your company is and what it stands for.

7. Measure. Measure. Measure.

Those are three of the most important words in advertising and marketing.

But surprisingly, the majority of firms operate at a substandard level when it comes to measuring the return on investment of their marketing and advertising dollars.

At RSW, we believe that the more you are able to measure your marketing efforts, the more you are able to improve them.

Our belief is simple: If you aren't doing great marketing, you won't get great results. And if you aren't getting great results, you aren't doing great marketing.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Conduct your marketing and advertising with only loose guidelines for tracking results.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Make it a point to provide occasional checkpoints that will allow you to check the effectiveness of your advertising. The metrics may vary, depending upon the type of vehicle. But we recommend devising a system that allows you to quantify items such as:

- > Actual sales
- > Number of responses or inquiries
- > New leads generated

Through research you can also test for intangibles, such as changes in name awareness, awareness of brand attributes, favorable perceptions of your company, perceived strengths and weaknesses, and so on.

8. Know Where the Real Profits Are.

Not all customers are created equal.

Some make you wealthy. Others contribute a little to your overall profitability. Still others merely break even and allow you to recoup the cost of servicing them. And some actually wind up costing you more money than you'll ever make from them.

For most companies, 20 percent of their current customers represent 80 percent of their current profitability. And, by extension, 20 percent of their potential customers represent 80 percent of their potential profitability.

Yet it's amazing how many marketers continue to treat all prospects as if they were equal.

If you're looking to make your marketing and advertising more cost efficient, maybe you shouldn't reconsider frequency, or media, or size, or coverage. Maybe you should reconsider who your real audience is.

A crucial step in developing a profitable marketing strategy isn't to identify all the customers you can possibly get; it's to identify all the customers that you actually, truthfully, honestly want.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

To advertise to a broad audience and not pursue your best possible prospects aggressively enough.

THE BEST PRACTICE

To advertise to an appropriately broad audience while pursuing your best possible prospects more aggressively through direct mail, special events, and other focused initiatives.

9. Understand What You Are Selling.

The vast majority of marketers think that they are selling products, or services, or equipment.

But the most successful ones understand that they are selling something else: a benefit. They are selling the ability to help people do things better. Or faster. Or smarter. Or cheaper. Or all of the above. They're selling the ability to cut costs or generate income. They are selling a solution that helps their customers sleep easier, or get promoted faster, or go home earlier, or use their time more wisely or compete more effectively.

How many people actually want to incur another expenditure? Not many.

How many people actually want the benefits mentioned above? Practically everyone.

The most effective way to sell your product is not to communicate what it is, but to communicate how it improves the life of the person you are selling it to.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

To communicate the features of your products or services without isolating the core benefits that ultimately give them value.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Emphasize the central benefit of your products and services. Then present the features as the vehicles which deliver this benefit.

10. Frequency Is Everything.

Woody Allen once said, “Half of life is just showing up.”

What did he mean by that? That much of success is derived from being in the right place at the right time, and being available to act when a need arises.

From a marketing perspective, this means being in front of your customers and prospects frequently enough so that when they are poised to act, your company is one of the few to come to mind.

By aligning your sales and marketing efforts, you can not only put your materials in front of your prospects more often, but you can also give your salespeople valid reasons to follow up and develop a consistent, ongoing dialog.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Running an ad campaign without coming up with a clear plan to maximize the frequency of the direct and indirect contact you have with your key prospects.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Integrate your sales and marketing efforts, finding ways to create synergy by giving your salespeople valid reasons and opportunities to interact with prospects.

11. Promote Yourself and Build Your Brand Every Chance You Get.

Savvy marketers look beyond their websites and business cards. They look at every communication tool and every point of customer contact to find ways to strengthen their brand. Yes, it may be an email. But it also might be what the receptionist says when she answers the phone. Or the words your salespeople use when someone asks, “Why should I do business with your company?”

THE COMMON MISTAKE

See your brand as being defined and communicated by your advertising and marketing materials.

THE BEST PRACTICE

See your brand as being defined and communicated by every point of customer interaction.

12. Internalize Your Message.

The larger an organization gets, the more likely they are to experience a disconnect between their advertising and their people.

In large companies, the advertising and marketing team may have very little contact with front-line personnel who interact with customers on a day to day basis.

Whatever your external communications say, it's important to make sure that your people are ready to deliver on it. Are you promising speed? Courtesy? Service? Whatever your message is, your people need to not only be aware of it, but be prepared to live it.

At RSW, we provide clients with a communications resource that excels at helping them communicate with both internal and external audiences. Our goal is to help you make sure that your customers love your brand and your employees live your brand.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Develop and deploy advertising and marketing programs without informing the front-line personnel how they can ensure the success of your company's efforts.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Develop a message that is communicated to your customers. Then make sure you reinforce that message clearly and consistently in all your employee communications.

13. Work With an Agency that Understands All the Things Mentioned in this Booklet.

We hope this white paper has given you a fresh perspective on your marketing efforts. It's designed to help you improve them. It's also designed to make your life easier. And life is made immensely easier if the company that produces your advertising and marketing materials understands the things we've talked about.

How can you make that happen?

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Find an agency that doesn't really know about these best practices. Then take the time to educate them and hope that they catch on.

THE BEST PRACTICE

Hire an agency that not only understands the things mentioned here, but that can help you implement them.

Like RSW, for example.

We specialize in helping you formulate the strategies and tactics that will help you achieve your goals — and then translating those ideas into effective communications materials that create impact and get results.

For more information, visit us at www.rswcreative.com, or call 214-528-1818.