

Tips for Marketing Communications

The Key Role of Marketing Communications: To communicate the value of products and services offered by your firm so as to differentiate your brand from competition and to grow a strong brand. At the end of the day, a strong brand builds investor/shareholder confidence and makes the person (or team) championing the brand a hero(s).

The better you manage your brand, the more you:

- Help customers interpret and process information
- Help customers have confidence in their purchase decisions
- Help customers develop positive feelings about your brand
- Help customers have positive feelings when using/experiencing your brand

And, by growing a strong brand you:

- Reduce marketing costs – customers are habituated to your brand!
- Gain leverage with trade – you become a sought after brand!
- Reduce price sensitivity – gaining you greater margins!
- Increase positive word-of-mouth – delighted customers spread the word!
- Create barriers to competition – the opposition needs deep pockets to fight against a strong brand!

Tip #1 Your brand develops a personality through time. You need to keep your communications “on message”. This keeps your unique position clear.

How Marketing Communications “fits” in the Scheme of Things. Each component of the 4P’s (product, price, promotion, place) needs to be purposefully designed to provide both functional and emotional benefits. Collectively, they work synergistically in presenting your brand’s presence to market.

Marketing Mix	Functional Benefits	Emotional Benefits
Product	Product Attributes: <i>(it) meets or exceeds my performance expectations</i>	Brand Name Package Design <i>A brand for someone like me</i>
Price	Value Clarified: A function of anticipated/expected performance and expected cost <i>(it) is worth the price</i>	Price – Quality Relationship <i>Value for the money</i> <i>A prestigious brand</i>
Promotion (marketing communications)	Conveys needed information: Perceptions of benefits provided by brand are created and reinforced; points of superiority are clarified	Creates image Creates brand personality <i>A brand for someone like me</i>
Place	Delivery; Logistics <i>Access, Assortment, Service are consistent with my expectations</i>	Trust Confidence <i>I can rely on them</i>

Let's Talk Communications: The point of marketing communications is persuasion. Even more to the point – it is about gaining attitude and behavior change, with the ultimate goal of encouraging habituation. This is accomplished by altering perceptions through consistent and persistent communications and then meeting or exceeding expected value delivery. Both consumer and business-to-business marketers need to realize that purchase decisions have both an economic component (“this will save me/us money or make us more money”) and an emotional component (“I am confident about this decision; I like buying from them”). Both need to be established and nurtured.

Tip #2 Your customers buy for both functional and emotional reasons. You need to “connect” with them on both levels.

Persuasion Requires Purposefully Advancing Relationships. A useful device for focusing attention on persuasion is the A-I-D-A model. This is a basic hierarchy of effects model and it works like this:

In any market you have people unaware of your brand who need to receive communications so that they can be attuned to your brand. Awareness is the necessary starting point in a relationship; it provides the anchor to which other associations will be connected. With awareness, you now need to increase interest, arouse desire, and move prospects to action (remember, your goal is behavior change!). Various communication tools are used to accomplish any or all of these goals. For instance, a billboard campaign might be intended to gain brand familiarity while a point-of-purchase display can serve multiple goals – especially Action! Once you win customers, you need to help them feel good about their decision. Ultimately, managing ongoing relationships in such a way that competitors become frustrated in trying to take customers away from you is the perfect end point!

The idea is simple. You need to purposefully concentrate communication vehicles to assure effectiveness of your communication spend. Where will you focus? How much of your spend will be directed to advancing the very different relationships that you have with various members of your target market? Do you have specific, measurable goals for each? You will find that Hierarchy of Effects models are useful tools for deciding where to focus marketing communications resources.

Tip #3 Your communication spend is more effective if you have specific, measurable and time-bounded goals.

Successful Marketing Communications

Needed	The Idea
A clear understanding of your target market <i>Who are they? What do they buy? Why do they buy? Where do they buy? What communication sources do they use?</i>	You are involved in advancing relationships. Only by understanding your market can you know how to communicate to them more effectively than the competition
A positioning statement that shows how you want to be perceived relative to competition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you know your points of parity? ➤ Do you know your points of superiority? 	An understanding of how you are differentiated from competition keeps your focus on designing messages that “hammer home” your unique value to your served market.
A lot of time spent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ thinking like customers ➤ asking customers great questions ➤ observing customer behavior 	Your points of superiority have to be meaningful to customers. Assume customers ask these questions: What’s in it for me? And, Why should I buy from you when I have so many alternatives? Until you satisfy these questions and do so with a consistent, persistent “voice to market,” you have not won the day

Tip #4 Effective communications begins by understanding your target and knowing how to reach them with your messages.

Typical Marketing Communication Goals. Using the hierarchy of effects model as reference, typical goals include:

- Increase brand awareness
- Change brand perceptions to better establish desired meaning or to reflect a new position
- Introduce new products
- Gain new customers
- Increase customer retention

Goals are achieved by Integrating Communication Tools. There are many tools that can help bring your message(s) to your target market. Each requires resource commitments and each needs to be part of a purposeful whole. Ideally, you should have specific, measurable, time bounded goals for any resource commitments. For instance, you might target an internet spend in the following way: Following launch of the postcard campaign on 1/1/03 we expect an increase in site visits of 15% over the season-adjusted average of ## visits for January. We expect a carry over effect from the campaign to be present for February...” If communication expenditures have goals, then you have a means of assessing the effectiveness of various tools in gaining your overall brand goals. Further, you have a way to assess whether future spends are advisable!

Tip #5 Each communication tool has strengths and limitations. Purposefully using the various tools to your advantage creates efficiencies and improves overall impact to market.

The communication tools you work with include:

Advertising	Sales Literature	Packaging
Trade Shows	Branding (Logos, Trademarks, etc.)	Corporate Communications
Direct Response Campaigns	Web/Cloud/Wireless Access Points	Public Relations
Search Engine Optimizing	Telemarketing	Publicity

Depending on whom you talk with, any of the above might be argued to be “best” at reaching your target market. For instance, PR experts often argue that public relations has greater power than advertising, due to trust, media fragmentation and other forces. Meanwhile, advertising experts assert that well-targeted campaigns are more possible through advertising. For B2B, telemarketing is also favored, especially for lead generation. Meanwhile, few bet against the potential of web-based communications for adding value to campaigns. It is safe to say that “best” should not be viewed as either/or in terms of communication tools. Instead, you should consider the mix of tools that brings your voice to market.

In addition to the tools noted above, you have others that are essential to your success. These include customer service and your sales force. Both customer service and the sales force are “close to customers”. As boundary spanners, they strive to understand customer needs and to satisfy these needs profitably. In so doing, considerable learning also occurs. Companies with systems in place for purposefully gathering market information, turning information into insights for improved products/services, and implementing these insights into better brands, have heightened chances of building strong brands.

Tip #6 Your customer service and sales staff are crucial to your communication effectiveness. Keep them up-to-speed with your positioning/repositioning efforts so they can maintain the consistent persistent voice to market you are developing.

Delivering Consistent Persistent Communications: Each communication tool has a potential role in delivering messages to your target market. In fact, you probably have a budget for some, if not most, of the following. While each may contribute to building a strong brand, monies should not be frittered away! In fact, marketers find themselves increasingly pressed to demonstrate good ROI for their communication spend. The following suggests a few “heads up” tips for some of the most commonly used communication tools.

Tool	Typical Goals/Metrics	Cautionary Notes
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brand Awareness ✓ Unique Selling Proposition understood 	<p>Network TV - # of viewers determined by samples; many viewers do not see commercial(s); Demographic is diffused and uncertain.</p> <p>Radio - # of listeners determined by samples; many listeners may not hear advertisement; Demographic is diffused and uncertain.</p> <p>Direct mail – Targeted demographics but low read rate.</p>
Trade Shows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # leads generated ✓ % qualified leads ✓ facilitate new product announcements ✓ presence at show(s) required (you are only a “player” if at show) 	Often, leads are marginal/unproductive; effects of publicity for brand difficult to quantify; high expense; high time commitment
Publicity/ Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Clippings 	May be “all or nothing”; unable to control spin on eventual communication
Internet – own site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Traffic (pg views, session length, etc.) ✓ Conversion (browsers to registered, active users, repeat vs one-time users) ✓ Retention (churn rate, activity in community space, comments from members, increased spend as percent of total spend, etc.) 	Possible to find brand in “sink hole” spending i.e., the <u>ability</u> to continuously upgrade site is not identical to the <u>need</u> to upgrade site; those closest to site (company insiders) can be the least able to “see with the eyes of customers” i.e., always keep your eye on the target market – the point of the site is to grow strong relationships!
Internet – affiliate sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Traffic for brand awareness and other brand anchors ✓ Conversion (leads generated) 	Many sites assert that they have substantial audiences across numerous industries – the more targeted your audience, the more leery you should be of these assertions. Many sites provide numbers of active users and/or active members – while this provides large numbers to entice clients, these metrics are inadequate, usually exaggerating impact of site on your target market. Savvy marketers insist on deeper metrics including numbers of unique visitors, number of unique visitors who match target market, page views in past 30, 60, 90 days, etc. Red Flag: If deep metrics are not immediately available there is an underlying reason – avoid these relationships!
Internet – banner ads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brand Awareness ✓ Traffic/Conversion (click through rates) 	Increasingly seen as an ineffective spend; must be carefully cost justified. By no means should commitments be made to long term contracts. Insist on risk share arrangements where possible i.e., paying more for a high quality click through is better ROI than fixed fees for ad itself.
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eyes; personalize the brand ✓ Easy, quick communication ✓ Informal, with instant feedback loops ✓ Builds credibility 	Time consuming for executives. Blogosphere is already cluttered. Some view blogs as more useful for internal audience, ie, employees, than external stakeholders.

Tip #7 Market Leaders focus on using and integrating various communication tools to advance relationships, doing so in cost effective ways. Always concerned with value, ROI is a steady part of the equation.

Tip #8 While price is always an issue, market leaders understand price in terms of value. Market leaders expect detailed metrics from communication suppliers and they gauge effectiveness in terms of targeted impacts on served markets.

Times have changed forever: Generating buzz has become a hot theme in recent years. Popularized as word-of-mouth marketing, it is all about gaining legitimacy for brands by getting people to talk about your brand. Of course, this doesn't have to be left to chance – at least not if you can manage it well. Thus, the emergence of such terms/tactics as “leaners” (those paid to frequent popular bars, casually requesting particular brands of drink), with anyone within ear shot developing awareness of, and interest in, your brand. The broader theme of “underground marketing” includes numerous tactics giving your brand visibility. A classic underground tactic is to tip doormen for holding boxes – clearly marked with a retailer's brand – so that everyone coming and going can see how popular the brand is in the building (after all, look how many people are ordering from the company!).

At a time when it is estimated that over 200 billion text messages are being sent/received each month (this estimate was from 2003 – imagine the numbers today!), brand builders must find ways to fine tune messages and design and expect rapid response to campaigns. Take just one instance; word-of-mouth now affects movie goers preferences even as they wait in line to buy tickets. Your phone rings...a friend texts “lame” or “it sucks” – and suddenly you change your movie choice! We've reached a time when it must be expected that our target markets are completely versed in spontaneously using these and other tools, easily and swiftly passing information among one another.

Tip #9 Market leaders understand the challenge of identifying and keeping up with new vehicles for communicating. There is no opportunity to stand still. Merely using the same communications tools as in the past will surely leave a brand in the dust.

Ultimately, there is nothing easy about marketing communications and there is always uncertainty in terms of the effectiveness of particular spends. To be certain, there are an endless number of ways to spend your vital communication dollars – and an endless number of communication suppliers who will tell you they are the best place to spend those dollars!

Tip #10 Market leaders understand the challenge of separating good value (high ROI) communication suppliers from poor value suppliers. Their willingness to try new suppliers comes from careful study, risk assessment, and knowing that through time they will better reach served markets by trying new sources.