

PRACTICAL MARKETING TIPS FOR BIGGER BUSINESSES FROM *The Outsourced Marketing Department*

However big your business is, and however dedicated your marketing department, it never does any harm to review the 'hardy perennials' of good marketing practice and ensure that they are established in your organisation. The advent of New Technology opens up all sorts of possibilities for new marketing techniques. These marketing tips are a combination of new thoughts and reminders of what has been shown to work time and again.

1) SWOT Analysis.

Other business planning techniques may come and go but the SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) analysis remains an ever-popular method for focusing thought. When developing a SWOT analysis, concentrate on the top 3-4 items in each category. Remember to match strengths and opportunities against weaknesses and threats.

2) Research

Conducting regular research amongst current and prospective clients has always been a first principle of good marketing practice. The advent of online survey templates such as surveymonkey.com make this process incredibly easy. There is now absolutely no excuse for failing to research opinions and buying practices regularly amongst your target market .

3) Scenario Planning

Preparing for the future requires creative thinking. When conducting forecasting or scenario planning, it's often a good idea to open the session up to non Board members. Research shows that an individual with more background information about an industry does not necessarily have a greater predictive ability, only greater confidence that they are right. Furthermore, younger members of staff are often better at thinking creatively about the future.

4) Intranet

Most large companies will have invested in an internet website but they don't always look at the potential of a corporate intranet for boosting staff morale and efficiency. Where a company has several offices in different locations or employs a number of remote workers, an intranet can be an excellent means of exchanging advice and information between members of staff. Encourage people to post sales tips on your

message board or run a monthly/annual competition for suggestions. (This virtual equivalent of a suggestions box in the staffroom can also be achieved via a dedicated email address 'suggestions@xyz.co.uk').

Companies operating an intranet for communications purposes can find that it offers great cost savings and the potential for a paperless office.

5) Understanding Competitors (1)

When conducting a competitor analysis, look beyond the obvious. Not every company of the same type as yours is actually competing with you directly. (This may be because they are based in a different location or targeting an audience that has no overlap with yours.) On the other hand, a different type of company may have a product or service that *does* compete with yours – for example Financial Advisers and Accountants both offer financial advice and televisions are as readily available from a supermarket these days as from a specialist electrical store.

6) Understanding Competitors (2)

At a consumer level, your competitor companies are those that compete with you to obtain "share of wallet". So if you're trying to sell an investment product by direct mail, your offering may arrive on the same day as a holiday brochure. You need to be sure that the way you sell the 'concept' of your product works even against 'lateral' competition.

7) Public Relations

PR can be defined as "managing the corporate reputation – the projection of your company's image to stakeholders and the public."

PR is not optional – whether you choose to plan is. Get involvement from the highest level, know what you want to achieve and make sure that you measure the results.

As a company grows bigger and recruits more staff, its profile with the Press (or newsworthiness) increases. This is where it is worth remembering that – unless it is handled properly – not all news is good news. Sometimes, your corporate bad news won't reach the public domain, but it is always good practice to plan for this eventuality. Draft a positive Press Release (even if you decide that you don't need to issue it) and coach your directors/spokespeople for handling aggressive media questioning.

8) Competitive Intelligence

Once you have identified your key competitors, keep an eye on their activity. It is important to be aware of how, where and what they are advertising. Look out for any competitor special offers or other marketing ploys that might affect your own plans.

Take note of which competitor strategies are repeated – this can be an indication of initial success.

9) Affinity Marketing

Affinity marketing means selling your product/service to a partner organisation's customers/members using their endorsement. Critical factors for successful affinity marketing are:

- 1) The strength of the relationship between the partner organisation and its customers/members.
- 2) The means by which you can access those customers/members. (Is this a database or 'high street' marketing proposition?)
- 3) The quality of the data held by the partner on its customers/members. For example, if you want to target people over 50, you need to know that your affinity partner can provide details of age.

10) Worksite marketing

This is a form of affinity marketing. It is normally an employer-supported programme whereby you use the employer as a 'host' to facilitate the sale of your goods or services to the employees. Worksite marketing can have the advantage of enabling you to reach a large audience in one go. However, the build up to the opportunity can be a long and involved process and it requires two stages – the sale to the employer and the sale to the employee before there can be any success.

11) Mystery shopping

One way to ensure that you are providing your customers with an excellent level of service is to 'live the customer experience' for yourself. In the guise of a mystery shopper, contact your own sales or customer services line and see whether you are happy with the way in which you are treated. Remember – in an ideal world – the marketing department isn't just the people that handle the specific marketing projects it's EVERYONE and the details – such as how the 'phones are answered and how your staff dress for client meetings – all count.

12) Exhibitions

When you have a stand or presence at an exhibition, make sure that your whole presentational package ties together. The literature handed out on the day should help people to recall the stand and the products or services on offer on the day of the exhibition. Because exhibitions are not necessarily a regular occurrence, you can use them to pilot or test new marketing propositions. (Dare to be different – try a competition or product demonstration.)

Make sure you have clear objectives for attending the exhibition and ensure that the people manning your stand are properly briefed about what they are – be it to collect business cards or opinions, or to sell the product there and then. There is an art to manning a stand in order to be perceived as politely welcoming rather than a barrier to entry.

13) Segmentation

This is the art of breaking down your entire client base into sections in order to facilitate a more targeted marketing approach. The most obvious segments are: gender, age, income and geographical location. Don't spend too much time worrying about perfecting your segmentation parameters to the nth degree, just make a start and test as you go. Any segmentation is better than none.

14) International marketing

Before launching your products in another country, it is important to understand whether any aspect of the local culture or legislation will act as a barrier to success. Find out about local distribution methods and conduct market research. Always ensure that marketing materials are originated in the native language rather than simply translated from your own. Marketing textbooks are littered with examples of ill-fated international product launches such as the following:* **Pansy** (men's underwear from China); **Mucos, Pschitt and Zit** (soft drinks from Japan, France and Greece respectively); **Plopp** (chocolate bar from Sweden) **Krapp** (Toilet paper from Sweden) **Last Climax** (paper tissues from Japan).

**Source Paliwoda & Thomas*

15) Branding

Don't take too many liberties with your brand.

If you are diversifying by offering a new product or targeting a new market, you'll need to consider whether the association of your existing brand's attributes/values will be a benefit or a hindrance or whether you need to develop an entirely new brand to support the new direction.