

# Train the Chef and Select the Recipes

## A Winning Marketing Mix Requires Dedication to a Detailed Menu

Last month's article focused on meat-and-potatoes marketing — direct mail, telemarketing, e-mail blasts and other traditional avenues of positioning your company. This article will start with an area few business owners and managers fully consider to fall into the realm of marketing; that is, themselves. To continue our food theme from last month, no marketing mix is complete without training the chef.

### The 30-second Commercial

For years we who sell have been taught to have a 30-second commercial. That commercial must succinctly answer the questions about who we are and what we do. Be sure that your commercial is as current and relevant as every other component of your marketing campaign.

Spice up your commercial with today's jargon. Think about other ways to deliver it. Instead of telling people what you do, find a creative way to show them. If you have to rely on the spoken word, think of something really unusual, something that will spark more conversation.

I just changed my own 30-second commercial. In fact, it's a lot less than 30 seconds and generates more conversation than ever before. "So, what do you do?" Here's my reply: "I move minds."

That really is what I do. I move minds. A myriad of questions always follow. And, I am generally prepared. "You do what?" "How do you do that?" "Did you go to school for that?" I explain that I move minds with exciting training, consulting, keynotes and books. Sometimes, when I am feeling playful, I tell people that I practice telekinesis, levitation and magic.

While your preparation may begin with refining your 30-second commercial, it needs to go much further. Plan on advancing your professional development with training and education. Find courses on marketing, sales and public relations. The skills that you will get from formal classroom training are invaluable. Look for substantive courses, not just high-cost cheerleading. Be sure that you aren't the only person from your organization that gets this training and education. Invite sales reps, telemarketers and everyone else that has direct customer contact to attend as well.

Beyond sales, marketing and public relations, the other type of



essential training is presentation skills. Presentation skills training will help you refine your ability to convey information in both formal and informal business settings. It will also help you develop greater poise and confidence. Instead of attending a mass meeting seminar, select a two- or three-day course with a small class size, which offer opportunities to address specific developmental needs. Local colleges generally offer great presentation skills courses geared toward adult learners.

While we're talking about training, be sure that you train anyone and everyone who represents your company at tradeshows and other public venues. They must have their own 30-second commercials consistent with the image you are creating for the business. Also make sure that they wear the right apparel, whatever you deem that to be.

Give your booth a thorough inspection. Is it synchronized with the marketing materials that you have labored to develop? Are you conveying a consistent theme? Do you have a lot of great stuff to give away? Consider sponsoring a function related to the tradeshow. This will give you more of that biz viz — business visibility. If there are raffles, be sure and donate a product or prize.

### Mixing It Up with a Plan

So far, we have laid out the ingredients of the mix, specified our quality standards and identified the preparation that is required to make the mix work well. Mixing all of these varied ingredients requires a dynamic action plan, not a static approach. I track my "marketing recipes" with a simple worksheet. It maps out the four methods I use most: direct mail, conferences and conventions, telemarketing and miscellaneous activities. For each of these activities, I specify a quarterly goal and a marketing objective I outline the activities that I plan to conduct. This keeps me on track.

This worksheet is not a formal action or marketing plan. It is a clear, simple tool that works for me. Create whatever tools will easily support your efforts and keep you focused on the goals. Tools should not be cumbersome or overly complicated.

Returning to the idea of an action plan. The first component of the action plan is obvious; you have to have a goal. Your goal

should be realistic. But, at the same time, it should make you stretch a little. I already told you my marketing goal: clients and prospects should hear from me four times a year, or quarterly.

Whatever your goal, be sure and attach time frames to it. Time-driven goals help us to be accountable to ourselves. They also cement the commitment to action. Once the goal is in place, share it with everyone who will be a part of the action that earns you the prize.

Systematic marketing requires a budget. Allocate sufficient resources to support each activity you outlined in your action plan. Be realistic when formulating your budget. Don't plan to do 40 networking events in the same month. Plan, instead, to do a few varied activities a quarter. And, when budgeting, don't forget the costs of follow-up. It isn't sufficient to make new contacts if you aren't going to follow-up in a timely manner.

In the case of my own marketing budget, I allocate 10 percent of the gross on every contract to marketing. This is a very simple budgeting system that I can follow with ease. I used to have a hit-or-miss approach. I would spend whatever I could whenever I remembered. Do I need to tell you that I got inconsistent results from this inconsistent system?

Now, I use a planned system that varies the marketing medium comprising my mix. So, if I am concentrating on direct mail in a target market this quarter, I know that I must have enough resources to sustain the other elements of my mix.

I have to reiterate a very important point: you have to employ a *consistent* approach to marketing. Consistent efforts yield consistent results. My office sends out a minimum of 200 pieces of mail every week. It may be targeted to a particular market, a follow-up from a previous encounter or a "remember me" to a past client. Whatever it is, we know that it will not be less than 200 pieces a week, no matter what. We also know that those mailings yield a minimum of six inquiries a month.

## On the Right Track

By tracking the results, my office has learned a few things. Postcards get better results than flyers. Limited time offers get better results than open offers. Full presentation demo tapes are far more popular than the splashy promo tapes we used to send. We do the bulk of our business on the East Coast, no matter how much we target the West Coast. We also know that post-contact follow-ups have a higher close ratio than cold contacts. *Duh!* This measurement has helped us identify our most viable markets and expand to new targets.

Direct mail is near and dear to my heart. Let me share a few more things that I have learned about it. Specific product descriptions work better than a general "look-at-me" approach. To publicize particular products, we develop postcards and other collateral materials. We target the design and language to the market we're penetrating. Materials for general business clientele look and read different from the materials that we send associations.

We use language that has meaning to each particular sector. We also make sure that we market the appropriate products in those different markets. For instance, we market on-site training to small business owners, but not to corporate event meeting planners. Event planners are more apt to book keynotes and retreats. You will discover the perfect marketing materials through trial and error.

Marketing pieces that feature photos and graphics work better for us than those long letters. And, once again, postcards work better than flyers. Postcards are also cheaper to mail and easier to stock.

Because we employ a consistent approach, I plan our direct mail pieces once a year and have them all printed in bulk. This allows me to get huge quantity discounts from the printer and no time wasted waiting for materials.

When planning your own marketing mix, think about the meal we were planning earlier in this series. We had meat, potatoes and plenty of side dishes on the

buffet. The same has to be true of your marketing. Don't keep sending the exact same piece. Communicate different messages that support your central theme. Just like you don't eat the same meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner, prospects want to see the variety that you can offer them.

Add ancillary products to your line as a way of adding variety to your marketing. If you start adding other services, be sure and develop marketing that lets the world know about your new products. And, don't just rely on direct mail.

Use your telemarketing staff to keep prospects informed. Use your administrative staff to send e-mails to draw traffic. Keep the mix moving so that you consistently keep high energy devoted to the marketing function. Use limited time offers; everything should expire. And, freebies really do grab attention.

## Marshalling Resources

Right about now you may be thinking that you don't have sufficient staffing to make your lofty marketing ideas a reality. Think creatively. I use a small cadre of part-time experts. One person is a design whiz. Another manages all of the administrative functions like placing advertisements. And, yet another is responsible for both direct and electronic mail campaigns. I like researching markets myself, so I don't farm that out. I have found students, retirees and talented friends make good sources for part-time labor. We've also outsourced to various word processing and database management firms to keep lists clean and up to date.

Creating the right marketing mix requires constant trial and error. Like a great meal, it requires a few staples, salads, side dishes and sweets. Whatever your personal preference, consistent effort, fresh ingredients and adequate resources are the recipe for marketing success. **■**

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