

Integrated marketing sets sights on typical customer

The word "integrated" has taken on a whole new set of meanings in our business culture. Today, when we hear the word

"integrated" it can mean lots of things, including a coordinated approach to marketing, as in, "integrated marketing." Simply put, integrated marketing is using the marketing strategies and tools that are available and relevant to your target consumer. It means using them in such a way that they are working in harmony to deliver a consistent message to the consumer most likely to buy your product or service. The objective is to integrate all your marketing efforts into a unified message, and in so doing integrate your products into the minds and lifestyles of consumers.

Before you can integrate, you need to identify the people who are most likely to want or need what it is you have to offer. This is done by asking yourself this basic question: "If my typical customer walked through the front door, how would I describe that person — what is their age, sex, income level, education, ethnic background, marital status, family size, as well as their likes and dislikes, hobbies, occupation and any relevant lifestyle information?"

Once you have identified as much as you can about your target, then it's time to look at the vast array of marketing vehicles and media that are available to reach your target. For example, there is sports marketing,



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RANDY GARTNER

coupon distribution, direct mail, television, radio, special events, retail displays and the Internet.

The key to assembling an effective, targeted and integrated marketing plan is to look at your business through the eyes of your consumer. The easiest and most sensible way to do this is for business professionals to think of marketing as a blueprint for growing the business.

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself to help generate results:

1. How is my business significant, unique and credible? Marketing textbooks refer to it as your company's or product's "USP" or unique selling proposition. However, you might find it easier to understand if you ask yourself, "What products or services do I provide and what benefits do I offer that nobody else does?"

2. Why would someone want to become a client or customer of my business? It's a fundamental question, but one that needs a concrete answer: If you were the customer or prospect, what would motivate you to pick up the phone, log onto your site or even walk into your establishment?

3. Can you describe the profile of your current customer? This includes such things as age, sex, income, education, occupation, lifestyle, occupation, what they purchase, when they visit, frequency of visit.

4. What are the key benefits my customers are looking for? You need to decide what your customers need and want to know about your business. Why? They are the ones who are hiring you to provide a product or service.

5. Where does my business come from? Identify geographically where your cus-

tomers are coming from. It would also help to know how they heard about you. Was it from the media, the Internet, a referral, a vendor, or one of your associates? If your business is highly dependent on referrals from other colleagues, be sure that you know the names of your colleagues, the number of customers they referred to you last year and how much revenue that represented. You also need to ask yourself: "When was the last time I met with these colleagues?" You might also want to invite them to your office and show them around and even "let them play with your toys." The goal here is for them to see first-hand the quality of service and product you provide.

6. When does my business occur? Determine the peaks and valleys and seasonal nature of your business. Figure out what your actual net revenue was for the past 12 months. At the same time you must project what your net revenue will be for this coming year.

7. How much should I spend? Examine your P&L to see how much you spent on marketing, i.e., mailings, ads, yellow pages, your Web site, the Internet, gifts, tickets and lunches or dinners with colleagues. Take that dollar amount and divide by your business's net revenue. You have now figured out the percentage you have allocated for marketing. Do you feel comfortable with this amount? Remember that marketing is an investment, not an expense, and it results in increased revenues.

8. Where do I put my message? Now it's time for media selection. This is where you look at all the marketing, advertising and public relations tools that are available to you, such as brochures, radio, television,

newspaper, the Internet, direct mail and community relations. How do you decide which one is best for your business? The answer should be based on what types of clients you want to see in your business. You'll want to put yourself in their shoes and find out what advertising vehicles are used and viewed by these types of people.

9. What's on your shopping list? Since you have already determined your comfort level (How much you can afford to spend?), it's now time to go shopping. Make up a wish list of places where you want to see and vehicles you want to use to deliver your message. Then get bids and cost estimates from vendors, suppliers and the media. Take your list and apply prices to each item. Add them up and arrive at a total. This will be your advertising budget. If it is more than you had planned, then you need to do some cost-cutting until you reach a comfortable amount.

10. What is my message? Your advertising message should focus on what's important in the client's mind. The customer or prospect will be asking "What's in it for me?" The message has to focus on what will motivate my customer or prospective customer to call or visit your organization.

Next step: Practice, practice, practice. Marketing is a discipline that takes time and practice. But most importantly, look at your business through the eyes of your customers. What would motivate you to become your own customer? That's the bottom line.

■ **RANDY GARTNER** WORKS FOR INTEGRATED MARKETING SERVICES IN ELLICOTT CITY MD., WHICH SPECIALIZES IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC PLANS AND ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL BUSINESSES. E-MAIL: RGARTN@COMCAST.NET PHONE: 410/418-4030