

## **The Marketing Communications Plan**

Public Relations is all about getting your message out, in a way that builds relationships, that builds trust. PR is about packaging and targeting your story, quite often through the media. PR is about identifying audiences and issues. PR is about changing attitudes and motivating behavior. Mix in some marketing research data and paid advertising, along with some customer-driven goals and strategies, and suddenly a new term pops up - Marketing Communications.

Marketing Communications stares directly at the bottom-line and thinks dollars - in revenue, in expenses, in net profit. However, without a plan, marketing communications is of little value to any business.

No marketing communications plan is to be written in stone. Even on paper, the first word cannot be penned until the business owner or a marketing communications professional hired to get the job done ferrets out some rather basic research.

The job is both factual and intuitive. It consists of asking questions about the competition. Who are they? Where are they located? What products do they sell and for what price? Company history, products, prices, and location, plus industry trends and customer satisfaction, are also held under a microscope.

This first step is not to be underestimated. In fast-company world, the urge is to skip over this data analysis. A smart businessman battles this urge.

A good tool in the marketing communications war chest is a map. Consider this example of a business man, who initially proclaimed all of Fairfield County as his territory, but “definitely not” Westchester County, as it was too far afield and would stretch him too thin.

However, a series of questions revealed that time, rather than miles, from his business headquarters to his client's pick-up base to the final destination, was a far greater factor in searching out new customers.

With research firmly in hand, the marketing communications plan starts with a vision, clearly defined and tailored to the individual owner's aspirations. This vision is a simple paragraph that will drive your goals. Whatever the vision, it needs to be grounded in reality, while pushing possibility to the edge.

The goals should be few, clearly stated, measurable and relate back to the vision. The goals answer the question of what must be achieved in order for you to attain your vision. Under each goal go specific actions or strategies necessary to reach the goal. This list must be prioritized by budget realities and a practical timeframe.

A budget must state in detailed amounts the cost of each specific action or strategy. Once the overall budget is determined, decisions of priority, based on fiscal reality, can take place within a plan of action.

This plan may well be a two-year plan, or a five-year plan, with periodic reevaluation. This enables flexibility and takes into account the rapid changes experienced in our highly competitive business environments.

A timeframe for the plan should be set into calendar form, including responsibility assignments to speed the decision-making process.

A good marketing communications plan is one very effective way to stay focused on your goals and strategic actions so that you can achieve your vision whatever your vision might be.

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