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How to Get the Most From Your Promotional Budget Through Annual Marketing Tactic Meetings©

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Know Your Marketing Strategy

When you leave for work in the morning, you don't just drive aimlessly until you find the right building. You know your destination and you have plotted out a route to get you there. If you run into unexpected traffic problems, you already have alternative routes in mind. In short, you have a detailed plan for getting to where you want to go.

For some reason, this simple concept is often not applied to marketing programs. It should be. Destination planning is a critical step to effective marketing strategy and brand management. If you don't conduct annual marketing strategy meetings, you will find yourself losing market share and revenue to competitors who do.

How To Do It

Marketing has one purpose ... to sell more stuff. Marketing that "builds awareness" or "brand recognition" does not mean anything unless it plays a specific role in getting people to buy more of your products. In other words, all marketing efforts should be part of a coordinated plan and reinforce a consistent message using the best tools. Always ask, "Are we getting the best return on our marketing investments, or are there better ways to spend our marketing dollars to generate more sales?"

You must define what differentiates you from competitors. And you must make sure those differences are relevant to your customers and distributors as their needs change and as the markets you compete in change. Then allocate percentages of your marketing budget to meeting specific "destination" objectives. Those that are most important should obviously receive greater shares of your marketing budget. **This type of "marketing destination" structure helps eliminate the likelihood of funds being spent ad hoc throughout the year on marketing vehicles that were never identified as being "vital" to your organization's marketing objectives.** If it wasn't in the approved marketing plan, it should have a slim chance of being added to your budget later in the year.

B&M annually participates in marketing strategy meetings with several of our clients. We help them to articulate their business/marketing destinations. Then we assist in getting their entire organization aligned behind harmonized objectives. We don't set the destinations. We provide outside perspectives to help clients improve on ideas so that they end up with programs that have clarity, focus and buy-in. We also make sure those programs incorporate the most effective tools for each marketing challenge.

Even if you don't invite outside counsel to assist in your marketing planning process, it's vital that you engage in the process yourself on an annual basis. In marketing and branding, knowing what you "want" to accomplish and "why" you want to accomplish it, are tremendous aids in determining "how" you can accomplish specific marketing goals.

Who Should Participate

I am constantly amazed at the number of marketing departments that attempt to plan "marketing destinations" without direct input from other sources within their organizations. My philosophy is, "more is more."

TV sitcoms, and some talk shows like Letterman and Leno, are written by committee ... usually about 12 writers. On a show like the Simpsons, it can climb to 20. Why? Because it makes sense. When a dozen people collaborate under a tight deadline, things get done fast. Somebody always has a good idea. And one good idea inspires a few more good ideas until before you know it, everyone is contributing. You wind up with a lot of good ideas and a complete program that's more interesting and effective than anything you could come up with on your own.

This makes me wonder why more businesses don't include more people in their marketing planning sessions.

Why not put distributors/agents, product managers, customers, agency reps and *gasp*, sales people, in a room every once in a while and bounce your marketing ideas off them? You never know what might happen ... other than getting some solid insight, good ideas and the buy-in of everyone affected by your program. The key is to conduct free-flowing brainstorming sessions. No criticism. No one is allowed to say, "That will never work." Collect ideas. Build on ideas. Learn from those you serve.

How to Organize Your Meeting

At these larger meetings it's a good idea to pass out forms that contain lists and descriptions of past and current marketing vehicles, additional marketing options, seasonal impacts (like tradeshows and editorial schedules) and other components. This usually generates many useful comments and helps the group to stay on track discussing relevant issues. (B&M has developed custom forms that most companies can customize to meet their needs.)

Following this meeting, a smaller group goes over all of the comments and information that was gathered. Then the group selects the best ideas from the first meeting, refines the ideas and fits them into cohesive, interrelated marketing components ... always defining how each element is related to the others and how it will help your organization to reach its "destination."

Take Time to Refine Your Original Plan

If we go back to the TV sitcom again, the first thing that happens when the writers hand in a script is that it gets ripped apart and sent back to the writers to rewrite. Then there's a read-through with the actors and the writers rewrite again. Then there's the walk-through and it's rewritten again. During the dress rehearsal new ideas are pitched and fixed with more rewriting.

The point is, a script can always be sharper ... a joke funnier. An idea can always be improved on. A marketing concept can always be better defined and enhanced. (This is even more likely if the idea was born in a closed meeting of just the internal marketing staff.) More is always more. A plan and its components can always be improved on.

A 24 minute sitcom calls for a 44-46 page script. The staff typically hands in 10-15 extra pages. Why? Because shows always shoot more than they'll ever use. They never know what will work and what won't work. Things that were gems on paper may fall flat on tape or in front of live audiences. Lines that appeared to be throw-aways end up being comedic genius. The extra pages are for the "unexpected traffic problems" that arise. They allow you to reach your destination using a different route.

So marketing plans should always include more than is needed in the event one or more components don't work as well as expected.

For over 20 years, our firm has been helping Business-to-Business clients conduct strategic marketing meetings. While each experience is different, they also have commonalities. We constantly learn more and more about the importance, benefits and economic sense of "destination planning."



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