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PRINTtips

Consistent, Relevant, and Beneficial... Marketing Materials



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Businesses today have an immense arsenal of marketing materials, ranging from printed material (business cards, brochures, product and service flyers, newsletters, and direct mail marketing pieces) to digital formats (web sites, web-based marketing, and social media). While there is significant potential power in having so many ways to reach customers and prospects, this comes with a responsibility to align all the materials with their interests and behaviors. Marketing materials now bear the burden of being consistent, relevant, and beneficial to the intended audience. As marketing guru Seth Godin puts it, “In a world of too many options and too little time, our obvious choice is to just ignore the ordinary stuff.”

Avoiding the Ordinary

It may surprise you that avoiding the ordinary is rather simple: know yourself, know your audience, and tell an accurate story clearly.

Know Yourself

Why does your business or organization exist? How would things be different if your business or organization weren't operating? What are its core values? Is it an industry leader? The answers to these and similar questions are embodied in mission and vision statements and tell your employees and target audience exactly what to expect from doing business with you. Having a mission statement provides focus for marketing



activities, while the vision statement describes the business's or organization's future aspirations.

Know Your Audience

Who is your ideal customer? To help answer this question, create a customer profile to include age, gender, job title, ethnicity, marital status, skills, interests, personality traits, values, frustrations, likes, and dislikes. Think about who specifically is looking for the products and services you offer rather than everyone to whom you might possible sell.

Your target audience can be defined by demographic information — the characteristics of a population. The most commonly used demographic attributes for marketing are age, gender, income level, race, and ethnicity. Psychographic information adds to demographic information by incorporating the interests, attitudes, opinions, values, lifestyle, and

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“Psychographic information is used to predict why a prospect might buy.”

personality of a population. Psychographic information is used to predict why a prospect might buy.

Tell Your Story

A business's or organization's story uses clear language and visual images to explain how customers will benefit. The focus of the story is on the customer, not on the business or its products and services. Here are some questions that help craft the story:

- How will your products or services benefit your audience (i.e., what's it for me?)
- What needs do your products or services fulfill? What problems do they solve?
- What value does your business or organization bring to the audience that can't be found from your competitors?

Creating a Brand Identity

The brand identity of your business or organization is embodied in its visual images: logo, printed materials, and web site. Taken together, they define the character of your business. Because most successful sales are based on establishing a trusting relationship between buyer and seller, it is important that the brand identity accurately represent the values of the business and that it be consistent across all marketing channels.

Here are some of the elements of brand identity:

- **The promises you make to customers and how well you keep them.** Besides the promises related to specific products and services, this also includes overall business practices like meeting deadlines and delivery dates, delivering added value, and the process for solving problems or making good on mistakes.
- **The benefits that accrue to customers from using your products and services.** These include tangibles like more time or money and intangibles like enhanced status or greater feeling of security.

“Brand identity extends to the communication style used by your business or organization...”

“... all brands have a personality: ...”

• How you nurture the business relationship.

Regular communication via printed and web-based newsletters, social media, in-person visits, and personalized messages demonstrate that the relationship with the customer matters to the business.

Brand identity extends to the communication style used by your business or organization to provide information. The elements of communication style are words, grammar, syntax, and meaning. The most effective communication style is clear (uses commonly-understood words), economical (uses simple sentence structure), free from jargon and obscure references, and has variety.

Pamela Wilson, a graphic designer and marketing consultant in Nashville, Tennessee, suggests that all brands have a personality, such as friendly, reserved, classic, or contemporary.

The brand identity embodies this personality in the choice of visual elements — color palette, typography, symbols, graphics, photographs, logo, and communication style. For a traditional, established business, Pamela suggests using a classic typeface, conservative rich colors, and a more formal corporate communication style. In contrast, a contemporary, high-energy company can use more edgy visual elements, a non-traditional typeface, and a friendly, casual communication style.

By carefully establishing your brand identity, all your marketing materials will appear to be coming from the same source over time, creating a sense of dependability in the mind of the customer.

Basic Marketing Package

A basic marketing package consists of five elements: business cards, company brochure, product and service flyers, newsletter, and web site.

- **Business cards:** Business cards are often the first point of contact for a prospect and start the process of establishing a relationship. To avoid

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visual clutter, edit the information down to the essentials: company name, address, logo, and tagline; the individual's name, title, and preferred ways to contact; and company web site URL. The business card will look best if it has sufficient white space. Consider using the back of the card if needed.

- **Company brochure:** The company brochure introduces the company, defines the most important benefits that will accrue to the customer, tells how results have been produced for others, and issues a call to action. It also includes company contact information — company name and logo, address, telephone number, e-mail, and web site address.
- **Product or service flyer:** A product or service flyer defines what the company is selling. It discusses the features and benefits of a single product or service or group of related products and services, and includes photographs and illustrations to attract the reader's attention and draw him into the message. The flyer needs a call to action and the specific way to make contact about the product or service. Company information — name, logo, address, and web site address — is also part of the flyer.

- **Newsletter:** A newsletter is an effective way to stay in touch with customers or introduce the company to prospects. A rule of thumb is that at least 80% of the information should be of interest and relevant to the customer or prospect, and no more than 20% sales message. The newsletter can be delivered by the USPS or sent digitally.
- **Web site:** Because the company web site effectively has no space limitations, it can incorporate all the information from the company brochure and product or service flyers, plus tell an expanded version of the company story — its history, specialty area, geographic reach, size, and client base. Customers and prospects are free to browse at will for the information they desire.

“A basic marketing package consists of five elements: ...”

Call on Us for Help

If you don't have the time to write, design, and/or print your marketing materials, call on us to help. We will work with you to plan the creation of marketing materials, ensure consistent brand identity, and help with any or all of the production steps. To get started, call us for an appointment.

Three Things to Avoid

To improve the quality and effectiveness of the messages in your marketing materials, train yourself to avoid these three things:

- 1. Listing product or service features without translating them into benefits.** This forces the prospect to figure out why a feature is important or how it might be useful. Don't let this happen — the prospect may miss an important benefit or ascribe a benefit that doesn't exist. To determine the benefits associated with a specific feature, name the feature and say the phrase “what this means is ...”

- 2. Providing vague and unmeasurable benefits.**

A vague benefit is one that can't be quantified, such as “reduces costs” or “improves productivity.” Make benefits tangible by attaching a numeric value that the prospect can calculate: “reduces costs by \$3 per item” or “improve productivity by 37%.” Any business can make a vague claim. Set your business apart by using a concrete example.

- 3. Describing benefits in generic or jargon-laden words.**

A benefit description written in industry jargon risks confusing the prospect or causing him to lose interest quickly. It also fails to articulate why the benefit is unique.

“A vague benefit is one that can't be quantified, ...”



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Choosing a Color for Your Brand

“Begin by keeping it simple: narrow the choice to just two colors, ...”

Here is a suggestion for how to go about choosing a color for your business or organization.

Begin by keeping it simple: narrow the choice to just two colors, and use them consistently in all your marketing materials. Next, select colors that illustrate your brand identity. For a calming, serene, harmonious look, pick two analogous colors (colors that are side-by-side on a color wheel). For a vibrant, high energy look, choose two complementary colors (colors directly opposite each other on a color wheel). Graphic designer Pamela Wilson offers these guidelines:

- **Light, bright, pale colors = energetic, friendly, open**
- **Dark, saturated colors = intense, corporate, serious**
- **Bright, intense colors = high energy, powerful**
- **Pure colors = child-like, unaffected, trustworthy**
- **Grayed-down colors = low-key, neutral, non-threatening**