

# What is Your Marketing Message?

By Cathy Taylor

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Cathy Taylor  
creative--communications@cox.net

Creative Communications <http://www.creative--communications.com>

Marketing is creating the impression people get about your company and its products and services. It happens through many forms of communication including things as basic as how your phone is answered, what your marketing collateral looks like—including business cards and letterhead—to the even more crucial direct contact of sales and customer service personnel. Your impression, whether first or continuing, better be good and crystal clear. To make sure it is, let's outline the basic steps you need to consider as we enter a new year.

**Develop a marketing program:** A marketing program not only tells you where you want to go and how you want to get there, it reminds you of that path when the going gets tough. It is critical to develop a detailed marketing program with solid deadlines and revise it least once a year. Your company's vision, goals and priorities will establish how to most effectively utilize your marketing budget. When this plan is complete, you will know how to answer the questions: "Who are we? What do we want to accomplish? Exactly how do we plan to get there?"

**Be consistent in your communications:** Part of successful marketing is setting a goal and not deviating from it until you achieve it. Marketing is repeated, proactive communication describing what you do best. Once you decide how your company is strategically positioned in the marketplace, including competitive comparisons, you can develop the formula that will tell people what you have to offer that is unique and directly fulfills their needs—they have a problem, you have a solution—and your marketing should show them just how easily that process works.

**Strategic positioning:** This comes from asking, "Why did you get into business in the first place? What do you do better than any related firm?" The answers you get are the beginning of the message you want to repeat to your prospects and customers until you gain significant mindshare.

It's important to communicate just how cost-effective your company has made stone construction, for example. Remember, benefits are what your customers want to buy. Then you add in the "other" benefits—durability, strength, aesthetics, ease of maintenance and quality. Show how the quality of your work force and the advent of new technologies make masonry the informed choice. Define, articulate and emphasize what each of these benefits brings from the unique perspective of your target market – the architects, engineers and general contractors. And, last but certainly not least, don't forget the people they serve – the end consumer, the owner.

Print Media

The first step in any marketing program is building your corporate ID package. The image, or "look

and feel” you want to portray, gets designed into a logo for business cards and letterhead. This representation must be carried through to all printed material such as brochures, data sheets and sales presentations, advertising, and even the fence sign at the soccer field where you sponsor a team.

Is your goal now to create brand awareness, lead generation, or possibly both? This helps you decide where and how to spend the rest of your allotted funds. What are the steps in your sales cycle and how can you use these marketing dollars to make these steps more effective?

## Advertising

Although magazine print ads can be pricey, they provide more credibility for your firm than any other mass-marketing medium. By instilling familiarity with the reader, they breed confidence in you and what you do, which translates to increased sales and profits. Magazine ads allow you to pursue the specific industries whose readers are interested in buying your products and services. If you are a builder focused on one city or county, use the local “city magazine” as a starting point. All major markets have them, and then are usually slick looking, upscale publications that you company can be proud to be seen in. Compare this image to that provided by the “shopper” or “PennySaver” type publication and you can see why the prices are higher but the quality of the responses are even higher.

If you are after more impact with architects and engineers, target their trade publications and their associations. You can research your options online at [www.mediafinder.com](http://www.mediafinder.com) , which gives you access to US and Canadian magazines, newsletters, journals, newspapers and directories. Or visit your local library and check out Bacon’s Directory or the Business Publication Rates and Data by SRDS.

When you are ready to expand your coverage area, check out regional or state magazines. Don’t count yourself out of advertising in national publications because of the cost. Purchase remnant space or space in regional editions of these same publications. Or you can advertise in the classified section or take advantage of merchandising opportunities.

Reprints of these ads can be used for PR purposes and these publications usually offer opportunities for valuable editorial that highlights your company. In addition, you can use them as resources for direct mail, and as a result continue to bring in future business.

## Direct Mail

Some marketing gurus think that e-mail already has had its heyday while direct mail still produces the same, consistent results. Direct mail may not make the sale all by itself, but it obtains crucial leads that result in sales and its results are completely accountable. The advantages of direct mail include being able to achieve measured results, targeted audiences by address selection, personalized messages, the ability to test unique messages, and you can expect higher response rates.

What you need to pay attention to first and foremost is getting the right list. This is where most companies waste money – know what your target demographic is and buy a proven response list. Next in order of importance are the offer, the copy and the graphics. Pay close attention to all of these. Make sure your copy reflects your strategy and that your problem-solution benefits are clearly stated.

Make it easy for the recipient to take action – copy is king! Give them a call to action so they don’t have to think about what to do; they just do it. For example, “Call Now 800 xxx-xxxx before this offer

expires.” If you’ve targeted the mailer correctly and if you leave them with a sense of urgency, they will respond. Track your results and when it comes to your messaging, remember to test, test, and test again. Last but not least, use testimonials – they improve response rates significantly.

These are just some of the factors that should be considered as you plan the 2003 marketing plan you know you need. When I speak with mason contractors, I get the feeling they would rather be in the field, supervising projects, writing bids, talking with clients, playing golf or doing almost anything but marketing their company to new customers. That short sighted approach will let the competition—a tip-up builder, for example—get into the mind of the architect, GC or owner who could control the next job being bid, and that could be a big problem.

Cathy Taylor is a marketing and sales consultant with over 20 years experience. She specializes in strategy and plan development as well as management of communications and public relations programs in both the high-tech and small business sectors. She can be reached at Creative Communications: [creative-communications.com](http://creative-communications.com)

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