

Your 2004 Marketing Plan

By Cathy Taylor

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Cathy Taylor
creative--communications@cox.net

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

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Anyone who has promoted their own business knows successful marketing requires multiple programs and that it is a fluid operation that consistently changes throughout an organization. Face it; you have to be creative.

Creativity executed in every aspect of your business will not only keep you happily employed, it will propel you forward to success. You want to be unique in all of your marketing adventures; particularly when you are trying new approaches to discover what does and does not work.

Let's review some of the opportunities we have to reach out for new and repeat orders whether you are beginning a new business or expanding an existing one.

Advertising

What is the goal of your advertising – branding, lead generation or both? Millions of dollars are spent on branding campaigns just to build awareness of a product or service. While that is the way of big business; most entrepreneurs need leads; and cash flow is their primary motivation.

Ask yourself, "What are some creative ways I can advertise my business?" Where does my target market hang out? What are their buying habits and hobbies? This helps you identify where they are most likely to see you so you can choose the right vehicle.

Then you have to work on the right message. How can I grab their attention in six seconds? What action do I want them to take? How many words will it take me to get from one to the other? If you need to learn how to write good copy that sells, study from the people who have made millions doing just that. Read books by Joe Sugarman and Ted Nicholas for instance.

Traditional advertising routes include print ads in magazines and newspapers, or you could forage into the new online world of banners, email campaigns and/or newsletters/e-zines (more information regarding online follows). What about TV/radio commercials, signs, billboards, flyers, brochures, direct mail pieces, custom letters, postcards, or coupons? Again, whom are you talking to and what do you want them to hear? The more creative you can be with you're positioning; the easier it is for them to perceive your uniqueness, the better your hook will reel in the fish.

Public Relations

Press Release

The power of a press release cannot be understated. They are not difficult to write and you can find dozens of service providers on the Internet. In the meantime, here are some critical points to get you started:

Ø DON'T SELL

Press releases are not sales tools. If your idea doesn't have a newsworthy angle, forget it. Don't waste your time or the editor's.

Ø HOOK THEM FIRST

You need to solve a problem for the reader and quickly let them know how they'll benefit by reading it. If your headline doesn't grab their attention, that's as far as they'll read.

Ø CONTENT

Keep the leading paragraph strong and interesting by answering who, what, where, when, why and how. Then provide background information, corporate summary, exciting quotes, and please, just the facts.

Ø KISS

Keep it short and simple, around 300 words and make sure to include contact information.

Only get in touch with editors who write about your industry or topic. Some editors like to be contacted by mail, others prefer email and fax – give them what they ask for. Do NOT call editors – they hate that. And, if they ask for email, never send an attachment. To distribute your news release, you can use the services of Businesswire, PRNewswire or an online service such as eReleases or PRWeb.

Article Publication

Publishing industry articles with a company byline is very powerful and if you don't use it, you are missing out on many opportunities.

Print publications often look for freelance writers. A good PR person obtains editorial calendars 6 months to 1 year in advance and develops appropriate story ideas around these plans. For example, what if Concrete Homes magazine has an article scheduled on waterproofing. Can you offer a unique perspective on how your company solves this issue for homebuilders? If yes, then pitch the magazine and write about it. Make sure you get a byline and bio within the article.

Or, possibly you offer a safer living structure that addresses natural disaster resistance? If so, this could make an interesting builder profile. Another way to bring attention to your firm is through award recognition programs provided by such firms as Cedar Valley Corp.

One media resource is <http://www.mediafinder.com>. Here you can locate print publications including magazines, newspapers, catalogs, journals, tabloids, directories, reports, and government publications in which to place your material. Unfortunately it does not contain direct hyperlinks, but you can easily surf the publication's name to locate it.

If you need to find a freelance writer, try these sites: <http://www.elance.com>, <http://www.mediamap.com> and <http://www.guru.com>. There are all kinds of writers at varying levels of cost that can help you utilize this potential to your advantage.

Public Speaking, Community Activities, Networking

Investigate local organizations and get out in your community. What trade associations are close that you can attend regularly? Get involved in their committees – nothing sells better than when you create good relationships.

Do you have an active chamber of commerce you can join to meet other business people? Obtain a list of networking groups in your area and try them all out. Become good at public speaking. There are so few people that can do this well and it is a tremendous way to get people interested in what you do. One of the best ways to learn to speak in front of people is to join a local Toastmasters group. Considering public speaking is the second highest ranked fear for people, next only to death, it's probably a good idea to find a supportive and friendly bunch that will help you develop these skills. You can find a local group at the Toastmasters International website – <http://www.toastmasters.org>

Analyst Research

Analysts and research firms are often chief validators of a company's products and/or services and they provides great opportunities to expose your firm to buyers as well as the other people who influence buying decisions such as architects and engineers. You must build good working relationships with analyst firms such as Cyon Research, with honest and timely communication being the keys to success.

If you want to learn the secrets to building an analyst relationship, Dave Cadoff has written a book called "Analyst Secrets Revealed." You can read a sample here <http://www.analystsecretsexposed.com/asrintro.pdf> .

Tradeshows

Tradeshows are alive and well and they are a great way to meet new people, check out the competition, and catch up on new products and services. You can also make critical connections with people who have synergistic products and/or service that want to do co-op marketing. If you can't afford a booth and all the exhibition fees, walk the convention floors with plenty of business cards to hand out. Then go schmooze. By the way, you can find every tradeshow nationwide at <http://www.tsn.com> .

If the idea of selling yourself makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck, then study the sales process from successful salespeople until you can model their behavior without flinching or compromising who you are. After all, if you don't believe in what you are providing the public, maybe it's time to do something new.

Customer Relationship Management

Not enough can be said about how well you need to treat your customers. No matter what, the customer is king. Some of the best marketing effort you can do is to turn your customer service personnel into relationship masters.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software is a critical tool for every business. Varied levels of functionality are available and you need to get the right-sized one for your company, as well as a package with the appropriate features. CRM software can save you enormous amounts of time dealing with customer questions, orders, and returns, etc. The more automated this function becomes, the more profitable your company can be. And, because this kind of system "personalizes" the interaction with your end consumer, it also is an extremely valuable marketing

tool.

In the lower end of the CRM spectrum is contact management software such as ACT! and Goldmine. In the mid-market are programs such as Oncontact and Epiphany. One of the best ways to make this decision is to find out what systems others in your industry are using. Then you can be certain the right functionality will be available to you. Be sure to take advantage of publications such as Construction Business Computing, <http://www.cbczine.com> , where contractors can learn how to get the most out of their technology investment.

Here's one more critical key in easily promoting successful customer relations: how you treat your employees trickles down to the customer. Set a good example and that's what will get passed along as well as come back to you full circle. Never take for granted how much goodwill can boost your bottom line.

Internet Marketing

Trying to cover the online marketing world in this small amount of space isn't possible, so here are a few tip-of-the-iceberg recommendations on some of the most important things for you to know or research.

Email campaigns are powerful and one of the most important things you can do is build your customer email list. It can be used to stay in touch with your current customers, as well find new prospects through them by implementing viral marketing techniques. You need to be keenly aware of spam and do not use it as it can only hurt your credibility.

Writing an industry newsletters or "e-zine" is a great way to build your customer list. Write articles that peek interest for prospects to come to your website and sign up for your newsletter. This keeps them on the hook and your company foremost in their mind when a new project comes around. There are several online resources centers where you can get your articles picked up. Try <http://www.ideamarketers.com> and <http://www.marketing-seek.com> . If you can't write a newsletter yourself, surf the web for "online content providers" and you'll find plenty.

Many say banner advertising doesn't work, but if you are industry-specific they can be highly effective and very cost-effective. Check out directory sites such as <http://www.buildingonline.com> and <http://www.abc.org> . Or trade associations such as MCAA at <http://www.masonryshowcase.com> , <http://www.awci.org> or <http://www.concretenetwork.com> . Get a professional copywriter to create your hook and make sure you track the ad back to your site so you will know where to keep investing your ad dollars.

Try creating ads for text/html newsletters such as AECnews, Architectural Record or Engineering News Record. Because these publications are so targeted, the lists don't need to be huge. Just make sure your ad is good enough to make them click through to your site.

Did I forget to say you need a website? Can't imagine why you wouldn't have one. Even if it's just a brochure site that explains your company and it's mission/vision, history, testimonials, and past projects etc. It's another opportunity to make a great first impression with your prospects and make it easy for them to locate you. Search engine optimization is critical to finding your website, so if you do not have your own internal IT organization to handle this, then hire a company to do it for you.

Creative Marketing Plan Secrets

Why not begin 2004 with a well-planned, creative marketing plan? Here are some secrets that make it easy for you in a template format that you can refer to if you get stumped.

Strategy: First create your strategy for your marketing plan. What are the issues surrounding your industry and how will you offer a unique solution to them?

Mission: What is your vision for this company and how do you want to be perceived?

Goals: Articulate what you must accomplish in the upcoming year. Always include deadlines that enforce accountability to specific tasks.

Unique Selling Position: What is your corporate and product positioning? List your benefits and features as well as the value proposition you offer the client.

Competitive Analysis: What are the strengths and weaknesses of every competitor and explain exactly how sales people can sell against each one including pricing.

Target Markets: Clearly and specifically identify each and every target market and their nuances.

Create Action Plan: Write a marketing communications program that addresses each target market and includes phases of a roll out such as creating a new logo and business development package; developing a new flyer or brochure. Or developing a new website and online ad campaign etc. Create target due dates for each activity.

Do you need to create a database of customers or prospects? If you are doing direct response or Internet marketing, describe each tactic you will take and when it will be accomplished. What about Public Relations? Can you create an interesting news release for something new happening in your company? Remember to think outside the box with these. Create a list of editorial opportunities and identify what issues you will go after. What trade shows will you attend? Break down each step and list specific actions that need to be taken and when.

Analyze all of your advertising opportunities in print and online and create a chart of what is available including cost. Then prioritize your program and create deadlines for each to be accomplished.

Budget: Last but certainly not least, you need to create your budget. Include everything you have chosen to accomplish for this year and allocate funds to each activity or event within your financial allotment.

Here's one last recommendation. If you are new to business planning or want to hone this skill further, here's a great place to start (for masonry readers only). Get a copy of The Insider's Guide to Strategic Business Planning for Design and Construction Firms. You can find a copy here: <http://www.zweigwhite.com/cgi-local/SoftCart.exe/bookstore/p-igsbp.asp?E+aa0019820> .

Now get out there and kick some—you know what—in 2004. Good luck!

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