
Chapter Twenty Three

*If you were my own brother,
this is what I'd tell you.*

In 1997 The St. Louis Chapter of the American Marketing Association asked me to write a column for their monthly Newsletter. I thought about it and I realized that this was an opportunity. What would I tell my friends in marketing about advertising and marketing communications?

The St. Louis Chapter of the American Marketing Association newsletter, *TOPline*, published the following articles by yours truly.

How to get the best results from your agency

You have a brilliant marketing plan that includes specific goals, objectives and strategies. Now you have to execute those plans. They include the development of smart, relevant, and compelling advertising communications. Here's are some things to consider:

Understand and be able to articulate your needs: Insist on an agreed-upon creative platform in writing before seeing any advertising. Participate in the development of that creative platform. Let your agency know that you will judge the work based on that platform. It's a good idea to make this a policy whenever you are developing communications. It makes as much sense to include this step in developing collateral, direct mail, or public relations programs as mass media advertising.

Develop consensus at your organization: Nothing is more frustrating than finding out The Vice President of Sales hates the advertising. Unless you've successfully gotten agreement within your organization on creative direction, you could find yourself in an awkward position. It's not unusual for critical opinion leaders in a company to be unfamiliar or uninterested in reviewing creative strategy. That's a tough situation, but it is a lot less stressful to help them understand the process up-front

than it is to defuse emotional reactions later on.

It may be retail, but it's still communication: The pressure of a retail environment can compress the time allowed for advertising development. Don't make the mistake of taking the creative platform step out of the equation. It's as important to fine-tune what you are trying to say and to whom you're trying to say it in retail as it is in other kinds of communications.

Communications Strategies are not Marketing Strategies: Sure, you have specific sales goals. You hope advertising will contribute to your overall success. Be fair. Make an honest appraisal of your market and decide what is a reasonable expectation for your advertising. Build-in ways to measure success if you can. Advertising designed to "build awareness" without a measurement is subject to little evaluation of effectiveness. Finally, don't allow advertising development to become a chore. Find the joy in creative problem-solving. Have fun. Produce the kind of advertising of which you and your agency can be proud.

Choosing an Agency Resource

You have a job to do. As a marketing professional you want to give your products the best chance to thrive in the marketplace. It doesn't matter if your firm sells soap or aerospace products. Meanwhile, there are advertising agencies calling your office, leaving you voice mail messages and writing letters that promise you the world if you'll only spend some time with them. What should you do?

Here are some things you should consider:

Be fair to your current agency: If you have a full service agency-of-record you owe it to them to let them know where they stand. This can be accomplished at regular intervals, annually or twice-a-year. It should be done in writing and in the spirit of teamwork. Most agencies will respond to honest critiques.

Be cautious of the new business contact: Many fine agencies hire business development specialists. Sometimes the new business contact is a senior executive that has been displaced due to an

account loss. Sometimes it is a partner or the president. This contact will almost always have a spin on things that differs somewhat from the reality, most notably the true capabilities of the agency. Take it with a grain of salt. Not unlike the ritual of dating, this representative is going to try to meet and exceed your expectations and present the firm he or she represents in the best possible light.

Remember the only constant is change: Regardless of your current relationships, there may be a time when market conditions, management changes, or a shift in marketing goals and communications strategy make it necessary to add or change communications resources.

Consultants are available: Depending on the nature of your search, you may wish to hire outside help. This can help to assure that an official search is handled thoroughly and with a minimum of bias. It's also a good way to keep up with your routine business and avoid the avalanche of calls and questions. Specialists in agency searches can also help facilitate the process of determining conflicts and eliminate resources that suggest a bad fit with your current needs.

Organization and consensus are key: As with any communications effort, you'll need to be clear about the objectives of your search. Determine your needs as best you can. Get company consensus. Get approval of the steps you will take to select the resource.

Thoughts on Measuring Advertising Success

Advertising works. It helps position your product. It helps build your brand. It helps consumers make informed decisions about product choices. Advertising is an investment. How are you going to measure the results? How are you going to justify the expense?

Here are some thoughts you might consider as you plan your marketing communications program:

The relationship between advertising and sales: Some suggest that brand leadership is a result of brilliant advertising. They say that advertising leads to sales. It may be true. In most cases,

however, the scientific cause/effect proof is lacking. There is very little data showing how advertising works. Really.

Cash Register as measure: Sales results alone are a poor proof that you are making the right decisions about advertising. Don't risk trading-off longer term goals (e.g. deep discounting might get you unit sales and market share but your brand equity will erode with the price-value perceptions longer term).

The Marketing Mix: Advertising is highly visible. It gets a lot of attention. The best advertising in the world will not overcome a poor distribution strategy or an unrealistic pricing scenario. Remember, Marketing 101: Product, Promotion, Price and Place? Set objectives after you've analyzed the environment, the competition and the relative strength of your brand. Don't let advertising take the hit for shortcomings elsewhere in the marketing equation.

Long Term vs. Short Term Goals: Brands evolve over time. Consumer trust is cumulative over time too. Brand equity is built over time. It can take years.

Research Methodology: Tracking Studies monitor perceptions over time. They provide a benchmark as well as a roadmap for future communications. Take the time to design the study so you compare results against your communications goals. Focus Groups are a great way to get insight, too. They force you to make sure your message is engaging and credible. They often raise issues worthy of further study. Be careful though. Don't allow focus group panelists to become creative directors. If you let them art direct and write your advertising, you are allowing amateurs do the work you pay professionals to do.

Value of Perfect Information: Often the information you really want is either unavailable or expensive. Ask yourself: What information will help me get better advertising? The cost/return tradeoff on original research may not payout. Consider secondary data sources. Be creative.

Killer Creative vs. Smart Marketing

Each Year, The American Advertising Federation (AAF) recognizes the best advertising produced in the country.

Winners from 200 local events, if selected, go on to district competitions. Some will go on to national judging. An ADDY is a coveted award by creative people everywhere. This is perhaps the biggest advertising competition. But there are other national and international awards and printed annuals comprised of advertising judged to be exemplary too.

So, why is it important? Is it relevant to you as a marketing professional? Award Shows are designed to showcase advertising and the people who create it. Creative people submit their work annually to be examined under pier scrutiny. Some agonize over it. Is it all worthwhile?

Advertising is an anonymous art. Its creators are usually unknown to the public. Awards, like the ADDYs, provide recognition for the efforts of these generally unsung heroes. You might have mixed feelings about advertising awards. The cynical will suggest that winning awards (for advertising) is self-serving. Is the advertising agency ignoring important marketing goals like increasing market share in favor of trying achieve accolades instead? Let's face it, there is no shortage of award-winning advertising professionals whose marketing patrons have taken their business elsewhere.

Advertising excellence and smart marketing don't have to be mutually-exclusive, however. Think of the companies you admire the most. Take a look at examples of their advertising communications. Where's the best place to view such exhibits of excellence? Awards shows, of course.

Awards shows and published show annuals help set a standard of excellence. They provide a frame of reference for creative teams who have to face the blank page. You should want your agency to be proud of the work they produce for you. If they spend the time and money to enter their work you should be happy knowing they feel it represents their best efforts.

Cut your agency some slack. Do yourself and your company a favor and let your creative people find creative solutions. Trust their judgment. Let them know you expect creative and smart work. Challenge them to produce results and win awards. Tell

them what you want the advertising to say, not how to say it. Measure the solutions against an approved creative platform strategy statement. If you are lucky, you'll get advertising of which everyone can be proud. Maybe your advertising will win some awards along the way.

A Brainstorm

A pretty popular insult when I was growing up was, "The closest you could come to a brainstorm is a light drizzle." I still think it's kind of funny. Sometimes, though it has a ring of truth to it. And it's not just me. I think everyone, especially marketing people, have to continually challenge the status quo. Sometimes you need to ignite some new thinking. Often the idea of a brainstorming session is proposed as a step toward that new paradigm. It's a good old fashioned technique that really works.

Remember the rules of a good brainstorming session say not to judge ideas as they are suggested. Brainstorming sessions needn't be without structure. In fact the best sessions are conducted when two key people act as pillars of structure in this process: The Moderator and the Scribe.

If you are in marketing, you should sharpen your skills as a moderator. Soliciting "out-of-the-box" thinking from other departments in your company might not be so easy. After all "It's always been done this way" or "If it ain't broke, why should we try to fix it?" The best moderator is an unbiased one who can draw people out.

However, It may make sense for you to forego the role of moderator in favor of an outsider, especially If you want to participate in generating the ideas. Focus Group Researchers understand the technique and make good moderators. Your advertising agency should be able to provide a qualified moderator if your are unwilling to hire an outside research professional.

The moderator is responsible for flow. His duty is to keep the session lively. This person should be prepared in advance with the basic outline of the discussion but also be flexible enough to

switch gears if a line of thinking seems to be fruitful.

The other important role is that of scribe. A flip chart is a good way for people to see their ideas actually making the list. Taking double-duty of moderator and scribe really slows down the process. Try to avoid that from happening. If your moderator can't see expressions, he may miss an opportunity to harness some creative energy.

Veterans of Marketing will agree. Much of it bears repeating though. It's basic fundamentals. It's the "blocking and tackling" that can be the difference between winning and losing.

The scribe may also take on the duty of producing a record of the session. It's easier if the notes are legible. It's best to transcribe the notes shortly following the session when the ideas are fresh. There is no need to be concerned with trying to order the notes or analyzing the meaning. The record (notes) can help continue the momentum that the session, hopefully started.

A brainstorming session with no "next steps" is an exercise in a vacuum. You have to generate excitement and consensus if you want results. After all, you want more than drizzle, right?

Trade Show Planning

Automotive products, cosmetics, retail, restaurants, financial services, healthcare, travel, tourism, or sporting goods. Regardless of your business, it is likely that you will be asked to lend marketing support to a trade show. Like any other marketing activity, trade shows are most effective when thoughtfully planned and strategically executed.

Begin with a fundamental understanding of who will attend, what this audience hopes to gain, and why they will benefit from the show. Have a pretty good idea who your company hopes to reach, what they hope to gain and why they will benefit from participation. Make sure all the expectations are reasonably in sync and consistent with realistic goals for the trade show. The expense of participating in a trade show can be significant. It should be evaluated in terms of risk and return like any other business decision.

Details that might enhance the presentation and outcome of

the show participation include:

The design of the trade show booth/exhibit. Think about a single impression that you hope visitors will take away. Many people will be unable to invest much time, if any, lingering by your booth or reviewing your company literature. Don't make the mistake of trying to communicate too much or you could risk not communicating anything.

Pre-show Mailing. Most trade shows will allow you to mail to people who pre-register. Take advantage of this opportunity to offer these people an incentive to visit you. This might be a teaser or show special offer.

Show dailies. These publications can be a great place to advertise or try for public relations news release placements. They create incremental impressions and reach people in town for the show. It's another opportunity to get traffic to your company's exhibit.

Free Stuff. Everyone loves free stuff. Too often the premium item/give-away is an afterthought. This item might be the only thing a visitor to your booth still has in two-three weeks. Be creative. Make a statement with the premium. Consider it an advertising opportunity.

Relationship Marketing. Never lose sight of the fact that the trade show is only a part of a bigger picture. Your customers need to have a relationship with your company that will assure repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. Use the names and addresses you can get at the show for follow-up.

Finally, do an evaluation after the show is over. Make a list of things that worked well and things you might do differently next time. Keep a file.

To Bundle or Unbundle? That is the Question.

In this age of integrated marketing, you'd have to assume that the fewer agencies you have handling your account the better. In fact, if you can find an agency that provides all the marketing communications services your company needs under one roof that would have to be the best. Right?

Maybe not. In spite of all the scholarly talk about the critical

importance of a focused brand positioning and a unified message, no one has proven that this must be accomplished by using a single agency. To help you accomplish your marketing communications goals you may have to weigh the benefits of one-stop shopping versus benefits of specialization.

Why should you rely on a single agency when so many resources are available to you as a marketing decision maker? Sales Promotion, Direct Response, Internet Marketing, Business-to-Business, Public Relations, and Event Marketing are just some duties that might merit dedicated efforts from specialized resources.

The more you learn about agencies calling themselves “full service” the more you may wonder about separation of media, creative, research and account planning as well. Maybe it makes sense to unbundle the print and broadcast duties among boutiques.

To be or not to be “full service”? There’s the rub if you are running an advertising agency these days. There are over 3,000 Advertising Agencies listed in the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies (The Red Book) claiming billings over a million dollars. I assure you, every one of those agencies is struggling with the dilemma of whether to grow by providing a broader range of services or growth through specialization.

Your marketing plan and the plans of marketing professionals around the world will determine what will happen to the advertising business in the years to come. If you have a chance to meet with agency principals they will tell you that planning agency growth is more complex than ever. As marketing professionals struggle with the appropriate mix of resources, agencies are scrambling to meet the needs of the future.

It has been said that an advertising agency’s inventory goes down the elevator at the end of each business day. That’s still true. It doesn’t take a huge capital investment in plant and facilities to open an advertising agency. It does take a sound business philosophy though. It comes down to whether or not marketing professionals are buying what agencies are selling.

The Agency Evaluation

The client-agency relationship is a delicate thing. By definition, your advertising agency should act on your behalf in matters concerning your advertising communication. At the same time, you want them to be responsive to your direction. You want a partnership. After all, you will be judged on the quality of marketing communications developed within the scope of your marketing budget.

Like any relationship, it takes work. As the client, you need your agency to understand your expectations. If the agency is not in sync with your needs it could be time for a friendly divorce. You don't want your agency-client relationship to become disruptive. If you can strengthen the relationship with constructive criticism that could save you the expense and the grief of shopping for a new agency.

Here a five-point agency evaluation system. Maybe it will be helpful in evaluating your agency-client relationship.

Creative Excellence: Above all, your agency should be creative and not just in art direction and copy. They should be able to look at your marketing problems creatively. They should consider creative ways to allocate media spending. They should be creative when it comes to spending money and managing limited resources. They should be creative in presenting fresh ideas.

Smart Marketing Thinking: Your agency doesn't have to know as much about your business as you do. Although that can be beneficial. They should think like business people. They should recommend ways that will build your business. They should suggest ideas that are reasonable and strategic.

Problem Solvers: The best agencies will be able to read between the lines a little. If the budget is limited, your agency should be able to deal with that. If selling ideas into the organization or the distribution channels is an issue it might be appropriate for them to help with this process. They should be able to work with you to take anxiety out of your life and not add to it.

Capabilities: The agency relationships you establish should

match well with your needs. Evaluate the agency on what it does well. Suggest improvement when you can. Some agencies offer an uneven range of services. If they can't or won't accommodate you, you may need to unbundle some services. Weight this notion against the added time and energy that it may take to build an additional agency-client relationship.

Flawless Execution: Careless errors can cripple the effectiveness of any advertising. Nobody's perfect. But the greatest idea in the world will suffer if not produced well. This is a tough place for an agency to fall short but it's all too common.

Guerilla Marketing

Using guerilla marketing you can help you win by outthinking the competition. Underdog companies have demonstrated, over and over again, the power non-traditional thinking. Smaller companies seem to have an advantage with guerilla marketing tactics. There is a greater sense of urgency to generate an impact with fewer dollars. The best examples of guerilla marketing come from companies challenging the market share leaders. However, no matter what position your company has in the marketplace it's useful to consider the advantages of being a guerilla marketer.

Big or small, your product or service can benefit from alternative approaches to communication. Here are ten guerilla marketing tactics you might consider:

1. Media Merchandising - Instead of just buying media (especially broadcast media) by rating points and viewership, challenge the media to add value with on-air promotions and events. You might be surprised at how much additional mileage you can get.
2. Events - Sponsoring community events and generating goodwill for your brand go hand-in-hand. This is especially effective if the sponsorship reinforces a brand attribute.
3. Premiums - Key chains, T-shirts, give-aways of all types find their way into your customers homes and offices. The

impressions generated from them can't be counted.

4. Coupons - It's a great way to generate trial. Coupons offer people an opportunity to try your product and save money in the process.
5. Sweepstakes - People like games of chance. If you can make the prizes attractive enough, you may be able generate additional store traffic or increase the number of leads for your sale force.
6. Charity - A tie-in with a charity often makes great marketing sense. It positions the company as a leader and it can make people feel good about choosing your brand. It can also be quite rewarding to you and your fellow employees. You can make a difference.
7. The internet - This is still a new medium for a lot of companies. If you can devote some time and energy to it you might find a great tool for generating sales.
8. Out-of-Home - Billboards, bus shelters, transit signs and other Out-of-Home media can make a big impression especially if creatively executed and strategically placed.
9. Awards - Provide funding for an award or scholarship program. The award will generate publicity and your brand will win by association.
10. Word-of-Mouth - The best guerilla tactic of all. Think of ways to get people talking about your product. If you can get a positive "buzz" going you will have succeeded in creating a better environment for your brand's continued success.

Agency Compensation

Your marketing communications budget includes, no doubt, a big number for your advertising agency. It's understandable that you might want to scrutinize this expense. Is your agency overcharging you? Are they competitively priced with

alternatives? Is your agency compensation agreement fair? Should it be reduced, restructured, or renegotiated?

It used to be a standard practice for advertising agencies to earn a commission on all media. This method dates back to the early 1900's. The agency earns money on every dollar you spend on media. You pay the same regardless of whether you pay the agency to handle the buy or if you pay for the media directly, (e.g. an ad placement for \$100 includes a \$15 commission for the agency, or $\$15 / \$85 =$ a 17.65% mark-up.)

Agency competition, client consolidations, and unbundling of services are some of the factors forcing new approaches to compensation. The next time you are in a position to hammer out a new deal for agency there are a number of things you might want to consider.

Reduced Commission: There is no magic in 15% (or a 17.65% mark-up) Commissions should be compared to the staffing and service needs you require. It should also consider the seasonality of your media. It's tough for your agency to have the appropriate staff year round if a large portion of your budget is invested in the 4th quarter.

Cost-Plus: Your agency can identify all costs associated with managing your account. If they are willing to share this information you may be surprised at the number of people and hours that are required. Cost-Plus methods require both the agency and the client to work toward more efficient allocation of all resources.

Standardized Pricing: Every ad is different and every project has different elements. You have every right to insist that your agency work within a negotiated range of costs. Resist the urge to micro-manage but make them accountable. Study historical costs and sharpen your budgeting process.

Performance Incentives: Your agency says they want to be your marketing partner. Okay, give them a chance. Propose a portion of their compensation be tied to meeting marketing goals. As long as these goals are realistic, this can be rewarding for you and your agency.

Project Basis: The agency may be willing to manage assignments on a project basis. If your agency isn't willing to work this way, you might be surprised to find a number of talented professionals who are willing to work on a freelance basis.

Whatever you do, don't let compensation issues stifle the creative process.

Collaborate with your agency. Get their input early. Be firm. Be fair. Have fun.

Play the Advertising Home Game

It has been said that the average American is bombarded by more than 2,000 advertising messages each day. Television advertising, in particular, struggles to break-through the clutter. In spite of a dizzying array of channels and program options, there is still no more effective way of reaching a mass audience than through ads on TV. The Super Bowl has become an annual showcase of advertising.

Today's media-savvy consumers do pay attention to advertising that is interesting and relevant to them. As a marketing manager, you might enjoy playing The Advertising Home Game. The game is played with any number of viewers. It requires only an audience willing to forego trips to fridge during commercial breaks. Here's how it works.

Kick back in front of the tube. Schedule viewing of your favorite TV show, sporting event, the evening news or favorite soap opera. As each commercial is shown evaluate, quickly: What it's about? Is it relevant? Is it persuasive? Is it interesting? What was the brand? What was the message or key point?

You may find this a difficult task. Just as you are studying a :30 spot, another comes on to entertain and inform you about yet a different product. If you are playing this game with others you may be drawn into conversations that cause you to miss the next commercial. Save your comments. Takes notes if you wish.

Don't allow yourself the cop-out of, "This commercial is not for me because I'm not the target." Maybe you're right, but by virtue of your program selection, you are in the audience and

among viewers deemed appropriate for the message.

In this environment, you begin to appreciate how difficult it truly is to communicate. By forcing yourself to sit through the advertising and try to understand its mission, you suddenly become keenly aware of the challenges you and your advertising agency face when you set out to develop television advertising, or any advertising.

It's just a game. But in real life you need to be considerate of your prospective consumers. Remind yourself to deliver relevant, interesting, engaging, memorable, messages. The kinds of messages that outscore others in your home game contain clues to ways that you can be more effective at communicating with your intended viewers and readers.

The Advertising Home Game advanced version takes this process one or two steps further with additional questions. Why in the world did the client agree to that advertising? What was the creative strategy? Did the client get what the agency presented in storyboard form? Is this campaign going to accomplish its goals?

Integrated Marketing Communications - Part One

What integrated marketing anyway? Does it really exist? Integrated Marketing Communications is a concept that says the whole is larger than the sum of all of the parts of a marketing communications plan. It suggests that all communications should be consistent in message, and tone. And it should be consistent with the character and brand personality of the company.

In the 1970's, a handful of giant U.S. advertising agencies began to see that public relations, direct response, and sales promotion could be revenue producing businesses along with advertising under one roof. It was a way for U. S. Advertising to get even bigger and more profitable. The leaders of these fine agencies devised marketing strategies that allowed them to buy large public relations firms, direct response firms and sales promotion specialists.

They were convinced that clients would embrace the notion of

streamlined marketing communications with a firm that could deliver the full range of services. Further, they felt that clients would see the wisdom of a single message strategy applied across various communications disciplines.

Meanwhile, colleges and universities began to understand that students were looking for ways to be competitive in the job marketplace. Marketing students figured that they would have an edge if they were the marketing communications impresarios of the future. Integrated Marketing Communications became almost a buzz phrase by the 80's.

Eventually, merger fever caught on around the world, and the U.S. started to lose its leadership position in the advertising business. Agencies became more preoccupied with survival than leadership. Integrated marketing has been easier for clients to demand than for agencies to provide. Clients began to see the responsibility was not with the agency at all.

In the 1990's personal computers have had a dramatic impact on the way business people communicate. Internet marketing has become a reality. Advertising agencies are scrambling again to buy internet specialists.

Mergers and acquisitions have changed the marketing landscape of many business categories. Advertising is no different. Margins are shrinking and competition for individual services from graphic design to web site development cannot be controlled by advertising agencies. Why? Because agencies will always be in the business of providing service to paying clients. The faster technology changes the way we communicate, the harder it will be for agencies to anticipate those needs.

The good news is that the doors are opening for smaller, leaner, smarter, faster advertising agencies to pick up the slack left by agencies hoping to continue to get bigger and bigger.

Integrated Marketing Communications - Part Two

Integrated Marketing Communications is a good idea. Deliver a uniform message for your brand consistently in every execution. It seems obvious. It's so logical and persuasive. No other approach will do. Promote the same tone, positioning and

overall message everywhere your company comes in contact with its consumer target prospects. Otherwise, you're wasting time and money. We all know that's a bad thing, Right?

The architects of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) have done a great job of selling the concept to almost everyone who's been to business school, studied marketing in college or opened books on marketing published within the last 10 years. So what's the big deal? The big deal is this: Most companies simply haven't been completely successful at making IMC a reality.

To fully understand this dilemma you need only turn back the clock a bit. In the 50's and 60's the concept of a marketing-oriented company came into existence. Amazing, as it seems now, it took years for companies to understand what being marketing-oriented really means. Manufacturing plants were making things. The challenge was to make widgets faster more efficiently. The marketing orientation comes along and starts promoting the idea of understanding the consumer, first. (Hey wait a minute that might slow down our production line.)

Companies who understood the consumer had an edge. Once everybody in the widget business figured this out all they had to do is out-spend the competition on TV and Radio. The company with the largest "share of voice" wins. But they were all saying the same thing. The point-of difference (if there was one) was something about as important as "now with a lemon fresh scent."

Cable TV, an explosion of special interest publications, database marketing, the internet and guerilla marketing changed the marketing battlefield. Advertising agencies, public relations firms, direct marketing firms and sales promotion companies started to panic. They're still doing it. They're buying each other up in the name of IMC. They hope to capture a larger share of marketing dollars by offering a broader range of services.

But, as time goes on, it isn't about products at all. It was about products and services bundled together to meet consumer

needs. It's about relationships with consumers. You have to forge relationships by breaking through all that clutter. IMC is about being true to an identity and a unique position.

Marketers now are starting to realize that no one else can really integrate the message for them. They have to do it themselves. You can't buy IMC. You have to live it. Your company or brand has to stand for something. It's about having character and conviction. If you don't have those things it will take some time - a lot of time - like another millennium.

Your Agency and New Product Development

Your agency may be great at delivering advertising strategy and flawless execution for your existing product line yet completely dysfunctional when it comes to new products. Why? Because new product development is a different kind of discipline. Your agency may or not recognize that when you ask for their help.

Agencies can sometimes be outside their comfort zone when they are asked to use their brainpower to imagine products and product positioning that doesn't exist yet. Compensation agreements are often designed with specific product and brand needs in mind. They also often assume traditional means of communication in print and broadcast media. So much of this approach is routine to your agency, a lot of it is done by relatively junior staffers.

A lot of agencies are weak in product research and development. This is because research staffing is an area that has seen cutbacks at a lot of agencies suffering from trimmed margins and a trend toward out-sourcing research with the client's approval of budgets in advance. It's unfortunate that agencies no longer have the luxury of having research professionals thinking about new products for their clients.

In fact, if an agency has a research staff at all, they are more likely to be involved in a hybrid form of research called account planning. In this role the agency researcher serves as more of a liaison for the consumer to the client. Account planning is a kind of research that aims at actionable findings based on how

consumers feel about a brand.

Given the chance, though, your agency could surprise you. Agencies are full of creative thinkers, not only in the art direction and copywriting ranks. There are some things you can do to set an atmosphere more conducive to new product thinking.

Ask your agency to schedule an off-site brainstorming session. Challenge them to think outside the box. Remember not to place judgment on ideas in this kind of session. (It tends to put a “chill effect” on sharing ideas.)

Get your agency involved in some of your company’s success stories. If the agency can understand how your company makes money, maybe they can see ways to generate revenue with new products you haven’t considered.

Consider compensation that allows and rewards new product thinking. A new product might take years to become a consumer advertised brand. Your agency shouldn’t be penalized for devoting energy to future revenue streams for your company.

Ground Zero Marketing

It doesn’t matter what you do in marketing. If you are a product manager, a research director, a vice president of sales and marketing or an account executive, it’s inevitable that you’ll have to face the blank page. Your company and your clients expect you to convince them in writing that your ideas have merit. Unless you put it in writing the thinking may be lost forever. And if you don’t put it in writing it’s also pretty likely that your argument will lack the logical flow and persuasiveness it will have when you take the time to write it down.

Writing can be very difficult. It’s a lonely discipline. Your job as a marketing person is to be articulate about the needs of your customer prospects. Remember that you are the one that is responsible for understanding your consumers. Your company might have a sales group, a manufacturing division, accountants and financial personnel and maybe a human resources office. All of them need marketing communications in some form or another to be effective in what they do. It all starts with you. If

you don't believe me, consider the following:

A sales guy in his office picks up the phone to call a prospect. "Hello, I'm Tom Terrific from the ACME Widgit company. I'm calling you to tell you about how great our widgets are. And we have a giant factory we're building. Our guys in purchasing are the best in the world. And we've been in business since 1904." Click. The prospect hung up. Why? Because the salesman didn't say anything relevant to him.

An assembly line worker convinces his foreman that the company can produce 25% more widgets if we just skip a routine inspection step. The trouble is this step is directly related to the quality assurance of 99% defect free claim in the company's advertising campaign. Is a 25% increase in productivity worth a 50% reduction in customer confidence in your brand of widgets? (Needless to say, the profit margin will fall with customer confidence too.)

ACME Widgets is privately held but is considering an Initial Public Offering (IPO) so the founding family can retire to Florida. The Chief Financial Officer calls the lawyers and brokers who can help him take the company public. In the first meeting the broker says "How do you expect to sell stock in a company hardly anyone has ever heard of? And those who have heard of ACME consider our Widgets a parity product." Suddenly the accountants and financial people wish they approved the brand building campaign the Marketing Department proposed 5 years ago.

Finally, human resources is trying to recruit top graduates from Harvard's new masters of widget engineering program. It's the best in the country. Unfortunately your chief competitor, ABC Widgets ran spots on the Super Bowl. They're offering less money but graduates assume ABC is a more fun place to work and has a better idea about their career path.

What are you gonna do? Write it down. Start the marketing ball rolling. It's up to you.

Is your presentation presentable?

You have an important presentation. You're trying to win a

new account or make a big sale. Maybe it's a presentation to stockholders, investors, lenders, partners, owners, or franchisee groups. It could be a presentation to vendors or buyers. The presentation is critically important. The impression you give will have a significant impact on the success of your firm.

How can you optimize the impact of such a presentation? What can you do to make sure it's impressive? How are you going to increase the odds in your favor? How are you going to get your message across?

Here are some things you might want to consider in preparing for your presentation:

Content: Never underestimate the value of a well thought out and logical flow of information. The substance is very important and no amount of flash is going to overcome the lack of a convincing and rational argument. Make sure the content makes sense. Don't forget to consider your audiences expectations, concerns, biases, and beliefs.

Style and Tone: Once you've honed in on what you want to say, you need to consider the way you want to say it. What do you hope your audience will take away from your meeting? Do you want to be consultative? Do you want to appear aggressive or hungry? Do you want to convey trust and confidence? Do you want to demonstrate your ability to be a team player? Find an appropriate balance between professionalism and humor.

Media: Slides, Power Point, Video, Overheads, Props, Audio, etc. etc. Don't let the media overpower the message. Cute graphics won't compensate for lack of content. Computer imagery won't be convincing if key audience expectations aren't met. Get comfortable with your equipment. If you have a microphone, test sound levels. Make sure things work. And be ready and flexible when they don't.

The Leave Behind: Think about what you've presented. You might want to have a copy of your presentation in a hard copy

form for further review. Perhaps this copy is available for a decision-maker unable to attend your presentation. Be careful though: Your leave-behind can sometimes make its way to your competitors.

Rehearse: You will be surprised at how much more comfortable you will become if your presentation is rehearsed. If your presentation includes scripted material it will be much more natural if you've had a chance to run through it to understand the flow and timing of your points.

And finally, relax. You've done everything in your power to prepare for the presentation. If you screw up you'll just have to move on.

Public Relations in the Mix

You spend so much time thinking about your advertising. You plan your media placements carefully and you think strategically about every word of copy that goes into your ads. You think long and hard about your direct response and collateral efforts. You study the competition's web site so you can make yours even better. By the time you are ready to discuss your public relations program, you might be almost out of gas. But you have to give it as much thought as any other part of your marketing communications mix.

Public Relations must be managed too. It won't happen the way you want it to without your full attention. Even so, the public relations efforts are not to be controlled so much as molded over time. Unlike paid advertising where your message is carefully crafted and prepared exactly as you plan for it to appear in print or broadcast media, public relations is more about providing a credible case for your company so journalists can do their duty as reporters.

All good reporters are going to look for at least two sides to a story. If you make a claim they're going to look for someone to refute it. If you say you are the biggest or the best, they're going to want you to prove it. After all, that's what they learned in

J-School.

Don't fight it. Try to think like a writer. They need a hook. What's the story? Why should readers be interested? Is your story timely? Is it interesting? Does it illustrate a broader truth or trend? Can you provide photography or visuals that will help make the story stronger?

Relationship with your media contacts don't have to be adversarial. Take the time to develop trust and cultivate professional respect. Don't wait until a crisis to ask for reporters to read your press releases and discuss your business. Be considerate of deadlines. Understand that your materials must be organized and labeled clearly. Yours is not the only news being reviewed.

Respect the integrity of advertising and editorial departments. No reputable publication or broadcast organization wants to compromise their product because an advertiser thinks they can twist a few arms while dangling their advertising budgets.

Seek counsel in developing your Public Relations strategy. Share the thinking behind your other marketing communications programs. Evaluate your successes with fairness. If you haven't been open and honest and you don't have information that is credible and newsworthy you can't expect a lot of media interest. Execute your strategy flawlessly. Rely on your public relations staff or agency to deliver organized, professional, well thought-out media kits. Continually strive to improve these tools. Challenge yourself to improve all elements of your communication. Be responsive. Anticipate your competition's position and be prepared to react candidly.

Added Value Marketing

Sometimes it's the little things that make all the difference. Let's face it, we make choices every day based on perceived value. We buy cereal because of the toy inside. We buy a 20 ounce soft drink because it's the same cost at the 16 ounce size (4 ounces FREE), We'll even alter our own behavior for the sake of value (e.g. return a video early for a free microwave popcorn). Buy One Get One. Now with lemon scent. Fat Free.

Now with more raisins. It goes on and on. In a world of parity products we look for smaller and smaller points of difference to break the tie.

Value can be anything that a consumer sees as providing an incremental benefit. The key is to analyze the choices your customer is making? What are the variables in their purchase decision? The more difficult it is for them to sort out the differences between you and your competition, the more necessary it will be for you to find ways to add value. Here are 10 things that you can consider that might set your brand apart from the pack:

1. Time and Place Utility - Making your product available in a convenient time and place when the consumer needs it is a real value.
2. FREE - It's a powerful tool. It has been demonstrated over and over again.
3. Sampling - Offer the product with no obligation.
4. Trail Size - Give consumers a chance to try your product with a limited risk.
5. Bundle your product with other products and/or services - This makes the decision to purchase your brand less isolated.
6. Continuity Programs- Reward repeat purchases with a preferred customer card or make prizes available with multiple proofs of purchase. Never forget the value of your existing customers.
7. Convenience - Understand how your product is used and delivered. Even service sector marketers can provide convenience in the form of adjusted hours.
8. Affinity Benefits - If you can identify an activity that your customers are likely to enjoy, leverage that fact.
9. Brand as good citizen - Don't underestimate the value your

brand can enjoy by showing leadership in worthy causes.

10. Build the brand equity - Don't forget that the best value your brand can deliver is greater than the sum of all its ingredients. A brand that stands for quality and is reliable enjoys loyal customers and will often even attract customers willing to pay a premium for that assurance. The brand stands for something.

What have you done to my logo?

Every once in a while someone comes up with the bright idea that a presentation to a company will be just a little more appealing if the proposal cover has a their logo on it. This seems like a pretty good idea. How could they not love seeing their logo? You might be surprised.

We all know that technology is making designers out of some unlikely people. We also know that computer images, scanners, color copiers and neighborhood copy stores make it possible to do some pretty slick graphics, binding, paper selection, and imagery. But do you really think the reader of your document is impressed with his own logo as interpreted by you?

I'm told the graphic standards manual for Mercedes-Benz is 18" thick and in German. So it isn't hard to imagine violating their logo use guidelines. The familiar tri-star image is nearly universal. Don't make the mistake of thinking Hellmuth in Purchasing appreciates you taking liberties with it. Sure you want to get his North American office supply account. But forget about trying to lull him into believing your company and his are in symbolic graphic harmony.

If you look carefully, you will notice that logos change more frequently now than they use to. Federal Express is now FedEx. Pepsi changes the design on their soft drink cans just about every season. Shell Oil service stations stopped using any type on their signs. Campbell Soup isn't afraid to show a sprig of broccoli on their cream of broccoli cans. (Putting a food shot on the trademark can was unthinkable just a few years ago.) But none of this gives you permission to screw around with someone

else's logo.

Even less known companies think long and hard about how they want their corporate identity to be represented. So why risk the rudeness of undoing something the company has been trying to do with their company marks and logo? Let's face it the odds of offending the prospective client are far greater than impressing them. I say: Don't do it.

There are at least a hundred ways to get it wrong: printing the logo the wrong color, the wrong alignment, the inappropriate use of the logo next to another logo, the wrong typestyle, the close but outdated mark, the wrong division, the wrong size proportions are just a few ways to commit a faux pas.

What should you do instead? Present yourself and your company is the best possible light with a tasteful and well-designed document. Spend your energy on presenting your company and your proposal in clear, concise terms. It's okay to be visual when communicating a point or prospect benefit. Get cute or make a point with your own logo. You only have one chance to make a first impression. Don't blow it by trying to be too familiar. It doesn't work.

Mind your own business card

I'm probably like a lot of people in business. I often find myself unarmed at a networking function without a single business card. On other occasions, I come loaded with business cards and with no particular reason to hand them out. On still other occasions, I fib about not having a card handy because I have no real desire to receive a follow up call on Monday morning from a guy who wants to sell me something I don't need.

Someone ought to write a book on the business card etiquette. When should you give it to someone? When should you ask for a business card? How can you best use the business card in a networking environment? When is rude to introduce a business card in a meeting?

Salesmen probably have the most experience with business cards. A salesman never wants a selling opportunity to slip by

without registering with the prospect. A business card puts his name in the ring with his competition. Hopefully, the card, his name and the company name and reputation all produce a favorable response in the prospect's mind.

This little 2" X 3 1/2" piece of card stock carries a big burden. Pound for pound, it might be one of the hardest working marketing communications tools in your arsenal. It's hard to believe so many firms are so careless with them? It deserves some thought:

The business card is a convenient way to help someone you've just met to remember who you are and what business you are in. Use it judiciously. Use it as a calling card to let people know you dropped by or sent them a note. Use it as an exchange for their card.

You want to make a big impression so you have your cards printed oversized. Maybe you'll be a hit at the point of contact but your card won't fit in your prospect's card file. You have to consider the trade off of this kind of stunt. The same holds for the Under-sized card. A foreign size that is smaller than the U.S. standard might be fun but sometimes causes the prospect to lose your card in the shuffle.

Maybe you are trying to save your company money by using a low cost card printed black on a plain stock. This cost consciousness might be perceived as practical. But it might not be appropriate if you are trying to position your product at a premium. On the other hand, you may want to use pricey print production techniques to impress your prospects. Don't forget the impression your card gives could be negative if overproduced, too. Your clients don't want to pay for your excesses. Be careful.

Just apply this rule of thumb. The business card should be used as a thoughtful tool, not a weapon. It's an introduction, a reminder and friendly suggestion. It will never compensate for your own lack of performance.

Madison Avenue and Hollywood

Advertising, has received some pretty rough treatment in

movies over the years. Advertising characters in the movies have problems. It would seem that they have trouble dealing with the truth. And they can't seem to manage their family and/or personal relationships.

Here are some movies that illustrate my point.

The Hucksters, 1947: Clark Gable is Victor Norman. In this film Vic invests \$35 for a "sincere" tie to make him appear worthy of a high paying position at an advertising agency. He gets his shot at managing THE BEAUTEER SOAP account. His client vividly demonstrates how he thinks advertising works. He spits on the conference room table. "Mr. Norman, you've just seen me do a disgusting thing. But you will never forget it." He further explains that advertising must "Irritate. Irritate. Irritate." Vic must find a way to keep his integrity and keep his client happy.

The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit, 1956: Gregory Peck is a Madison Avenue Public Relations Man. He is uncomfortable with the deceptions that are routine in his work. Ultimately, he finds the truth liberates him, in his career, with his family, and dealing with his past.

Twelve Angry Men, 1957: This classic movie, starring Henry Fonda, is about jurors deliberating a murder trial. It features, on the jury, a pretty dramatic specimen of a wishy-washy and spineless advertising man. He's the one most willing to be swayed by popular opinion. "Run it up the flagpole, see if anyone salutes."

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, 1967: This musical farce based on a Broadway show features the advertising department as a rung on the ladder to the top. Another example of deception and relationship problems caused by a career choice.

Kramer vs. Kramer, 1979: Dustin Hoffman is Ted Kramer, a creative director, who's just been handed the big MID ATLANTIC AIRLINES account. Ted's Wife, played by Meryl Streep, announces that she is leaving him and their seven-year-old son. Ted loses his job while trying to be a

single parent. One memorable scene shows Ted desperately interviewing for a job the Friday before Christmas with an office party as a backdrop.

Lost in America, 1985: Albert Brooks plays a man fed up with the rat race and convinces his wife to travel across country in a recreational vehicle. After blowing their “nest egg” the hero is forced ultimately to return to the business he knows in order to survive.

Nothing in Common, 1986: Tom Hanks is a hot shot creative director who’s just been handed the COLONIAL AIRLINES account. He risks losing everything to attend to his father (played by Jackie Gleason) in the hospital.

Crazy People, 1990: Dudley Moore finds himself in a mental institution where he discovers telling the truth in advertising is a big idea. “Volvos are Boxy but they’re Good.” His mental patient mates are recruited with a show of hands. “Who wants to be an ad man?” Everyone does. “Who wants to be a fire engine?” Both questions get equally enthusiastic responses in the ward.

Twelve Angry Men, 1997: The movie remade with another all-star cast. In spite of other changes to bring the film up-to-date, the wishy-washy ad man remains a timeless classic.

It’s enough to make you wish you sold used cars for a living.