

## Marketing Through Performance Anxiety

Times are tough. Let's cut to the chase and acknowledge the elephant in the room. Yes, the financial markets are in a global crisis and everything from soup to nuts costs more these days. But when the going gets tough, the tough get marketing. What are you doing to find creative ways to stand straight, keep smiling and stay on message?

### *Don't Shoot the Messenger*

In today's rocky business climate, there is much raw emotion at play, and companies are making some risky short-term marketing sacrifices. Staff reductions, slashed budgets and reduced advertising plans are just some of the bullets marketers are trying to dodge. Yet now, more than ever, remember that there's a strong need to communicate benefits to your audience and add value to their bottom line. Don't be afraid to acknowledge the realities of today's tough market, but look to prioritize your marketing efforts and make a plan that will deliver value to your audience.

Communicate a clearer, stronger and more accurate message by refocusing your marketing efforts to align with audience perception. By doing so, you'll maintain a lasting impression and stay relevant in any market climate. Additionally, there can be an added bonus for your company. When the market has turned scared and less communication is happening across the board, the messages you help create are not fighting for recognition in a crowded marketplace. The volume will be turned up on delivery, and you can literally receive more bang for the buck. So make every marketing word count.

### *Silence is Deadly*

It's a sad but true fact in marketing — whatever the communication medium, a message weakens as soon as the frequency of delivery slackens. A company's branding effort through marketing is a long-term investment requiring clear, concise and consistent repetition of key messages. Companies need to invest in their efforts to stay top-of-mind for their customers and to dedicate sustained efforts to build and retain customer loyalty.

A large part of building this credibility is through being accessible and maintaining transparency in communication with your audience. Are you dedicated to sharing information regularly with this group? Do you clearly articulate your key messages and important goals as a company? Do you deliver this communication in a variety of ways to reach the biggest audience? Have you explored ways to incorporate, reinforce or even shift some of your print media efforts to the interactive side?

Customer loyalty is so important to a company's long-term success that it is considered an asset to be quantified on a corporate balance sheet. So how does a company seek to protect this customer loyalty during lean marketing times when budgets are challenged to the maximum?

A frequently overlooked aspect of marketing is in the area of information sharing, which can be worth its weight in gold during down market times. Corporate sponsorships, publication of articles, white papers and newsletters, press releases, and thought leadership efforts such as speaking engagements and seminar panel presentations are just some of the creative ways companies should consider to stay in front of their customers. Shifting the mix of how that exposure is achieved can be a strong defensive play a marketing communicator can implement when the general marketing climate is grim.

### *A Bird in the Hand is Worth Six in the Bush*

Another marketing truism is that it costs an average of six times more to obtain a new customer than to retain an existing one. Therefore, keeping and strengthening your existing audience should be the focus of every marketing effort, regardless of the current marketing climate. Identifying the most profitable segment of your customer base and maximizing your marketing efforts there is a win-win for every business. One of the reasons this is true is that trust is a precious commodity. Trust is even more critical during down market times. Trust, like loyalty, is built and nurtured over time, and as such, provides some measure of resistance to market downturns.

How should your marketing efforts improve the customer mix your business owns? Contrary to some opinions, today's savvy marketer doesn't waste efforts trying to convince dissatisfied customers and non-customers that they should change their minds. Embrace the niche your business owns within its chosen market and create a communication value that is unique, flexible, adaptable and compelling. Find out what your best customers think about your business. Identify ways in which to enhance your status in the eyes of these premier customers. Ask for referrals from your best customers. When the market climate turns favorable again and resources are expanded, the knowledge gained from this close examination of what is working well for your business can maximize your ability to reach out to a wider audience.

### *It's All About Them*

Another marketing maxim to take to heart — the customer is king. Focus your marketing message on what they want and not what you know and you will have more success. In winning over your target audience you need to provide solutions, minimize issues, and increase their focus on what you can provide to them. Service organizations, such as foundations, non-profits and charitable groups, are no different in this aspect than companies with non-service product lines.

Make your communication efforts part of the solution. By marketing the benefits of a credible, unique, sustainable and valuable business, you can achieve the flexibility and innovation required to deliver this level of service in any market environment.

So, in summary, a few ideas to consider incorporating into your overall marketing plan in these difficult economic times:

- Take a hard look at your current marketing plan. Is it firmly on message with your audience expectations? Is the plan for communicating the targeted message taking best advantage of appropriate communication channels? Are you capitalizing on the wide array of marketing media available?"
- Are plans in place to increase your audience's marketplace awareness through alternative marketing methods of information sharing? Can you find ways to become more involved in thought leadership activities as well as sponsorships and published communication efforts?
- Are you focusing the majority of your efforts on retaining and improving upon your existing customer base? Are you doing everything you can to validate their trust and loyalty in you as their marketing partner? Are you ensuring that your contributions to their business efforts are unique and compelling?
- Have you worked with a strategic marketing partner to help you brainstorm creative ways to keep your message consistent and engaging? Have you considered non-traditional communication channels such as interactive media and online advertising to showcase and promote your message?
- Are you a firm believer in the fact that your customer is always your top priority in the marketing relationship? And perhaps more importantly, have you made them a firm believer in that same fact?

Suka is a strategic design and marketing communications firm located in New York City's Soho. Since 1992, we have provided creative print and interactive solutions for a diverse range of clients in both the public and private sector. We combine smart marketing strategy with compelling graphic design that delivers award-winning results. To learn more, please visit [www.sukacreative.com](http://www.sukacreative.com) or contact Susan Karlin, President, at [skarlin@sukacreative.com](mailto:skarlin@sukacreative.com).