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The Angle

New Year's Marketing Resolutions

By most accounts 2006 was a good year for business. Many of the people we talked to said it was a success financially. However, most would confess that increased competition within certain categories has raised the bar for marketing and communications efforts in 2007. Top New Year's marketing resolutions include the need to capitalize on the benefits of real-time market research, to define and tell a consistent story and to harness the web and technology wherever possible to help in these efforts. At Trinity, our goal is to help clients realize their potential through smart marketing and communications. Therefore, we felt it appropriate to discuss the key trends we believe will mark 2007 and offer insight on how they might impact or influence marketing and communications planning.

The continued growth of online marketing and technology innovations will demand that top marketing organizations focus on four important activities in 2007:

1. Capitalize on the benefits of real-time market research
2. Tell a clear and consistent brand story
3. Increase education and research tools offered on company website
4. Increase attention to online target market segmentation

Capitalize on the benefits of real-time market research

The speed with which you can conduct market research to help inform your brand will be important to organizations trying to prioritize or validate a brand strategy that will add value, increase differentiation, have longevity and support the sales process. Today's technology allows us to capitalize on this opportunity and conduct research that is timely and effective at a very low cost; and the methods available are almost limitless. For example, having a Brand Advisory Board that conducts its meetings in real-time (online) and/or at anytime can provide the opportunity to speed up the learning process about your brand and be more responsive to the trends affecting your market or target markets.

Tell a clear and consistent brand story

A clear brand story must be based on a keen understanding of the market, the competitive environment and the development of a solid value proposition. In a cluttered environment however a value proposition must be translated into a brand story that explains who you are, what you do and why you are better than an alternative. Equally important for service brands is the need for a strong and relevant brand personality and tone that can be used in all communications—online and off. Today's most successful brands must be flexible, liquid and "have flow" with regards to how we talk about them and communicate their assets. As we become more and more dynamic, operating in real-time, successful brands will need to adapt messaging to address the specific needs of individual segments of the market. This does not mean that the company or the value proposition needs to change, but the marketing message must continue to evolve and be translated in real-time.

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Telling a clear and consistent brand story also speaks to the importance of managing creative across the entire communications platform, not just in the visual representation. For example, a company like Dancing Deer is emerging as a very creative marketer in terms of how Trish Karter brands her company. Its 2006 holiday campaign was not based in the visual representation of their products, but rather in positioning, messaging and the use of media to promote their products. We see a growth in the value placed on formal communications planning within an organization and how this can help to facilitate success in an integrated marketing and communications campaign.

Increase education and information tools offered on company website

More than ever, people are using the web to research and self educate. To many, the web is the center of the universe for information gathering. A few leading brands have already capitalized on this opportunity by expanding the educational component on their website and aligning their online advertising (SEO/PPC) efforts to drive prospects by "subject" or "search request" to their site (i.e. Fidelity Investments and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts).

In addition to online efforts, such companies are aligning their messaging in broad-based, traditional advertising campaigns to also drive traffic to their websites. By doing this, they not only reinforce their brand awareness among select target audiences but each visit to their site creates an opportunity for them to understand their market and increase their brand intelligence to better serve their customers. In the coming year, we will see more companies expanding their websites and education vaults to help them better understand their customer needs and align their services to meet those needs.

Increase attention to online target market segmentation

As a result of the increase in web tools, companies are gaining greater insight about the interests, needs and habits of customers, prospects and "low hanging fruit." Target marketing while critical can be difficult, especially online because the web is an extremely fragmented universe and it can be expensive and ineffective if done without the proper intelligence on target needs, usage and habits.

To perform target market segmentation, you have to categorize prospects by common needs that will respond similarly to marketing actions. These groups tend to be somewhat homogeneous thus making it easier to build marketing programs to reach each one. Once you have built marketing programs online to reach each target audience, you can effectively measure your return on investment for each particular customer's need.

Proper positioning and implementation of appropriate tracking tools can capture useful data on your target audience and provide organizations with the information needed to be better equipped to respond to the demands of the target through increasingly customized programs that motivate them. Once these tracking tools are in place, you can constantly alter and monitor your strategy and how it affects your market. More than ever, it is essential for a business to be able to track its success effectively and fast, and increased focus online is an important method that is also cost effective.

2007 is sure to be a year of new trends, technological innovations and smart communications. Trinity has made resolutions to realize the potential in these and use them effectively.

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