



Greetings,

It's a fluctuating world out there. There are days when the Dow shows signs of recovery, followed by days where stocks seem to just plummet. Each time these fluctuations occur, the world we operate in seems to change yet again. This creates a big challenge for companies trying to adhere to their marketing plans. Wouldn't it be nice to have an accurate forecast for the day, the quarter or even the year?

Trinity Communications wants to help. While we can't predict which days you should bring your umbrella, we can arm you with some of our best thinking and value-added information. As such, we've assembled *The 2009 Marketers Survival Guide for Weathering the Storm*. This Ebook is a collection of some of our most recent and relevant thought pieces related to marketing and communications. Ranging from communications planning to how to get started with online video, we hope this Ebook helps you feel a bit more informed and confident during these trying times.

As always, we welcome your feedback on this Ebook and wish you the best of luck as you strive to meet your business goals and objectives in 2009. May the sun always be shining on your back.

Sincerely,



Dan Logan



trinity



FORECAST:

FOG

Foggy

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Open, honest dialogue, clear communications and online video

Communicating in an “Age of Authenticity”: Strategies for Maintaining Trust With Clients

By Dan Logan

“No man can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which may be true.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*

These days, much attention is being paid to the ins and outs of Obama’s economic stimulus plan. The President has been very vocal on the subject of taxpayer dollars being used to bailout big companies and he remains focused on making sure that the money does not go to funding salaries or big bonuses—a very public problem in the media. But what about the bigger issue this problem presents for anyone looking to capture and retain the trust of customers and clients?

The Consumer Confidence Index reached a historic all-time low in February 2009, according to the Conference Board. Because of this and an overall decline in trust, the way in which companies communicate with customers and clients may forever be altered.

For most businesses, 2009 will be an uphill battle. It will be a year for experimenting—changing what isn’t working, playing up more of what is and trying new things. Below are some communication tactics that can help you maintain the trust of those you serve in this new era:

Straight Talk Is In.

Recently, Northern Trust came under scrutiny for sponsoring a PGA golf tournament amidst incredibly difficult financial times. The CEO responded by quickly issuing an open letter to all the stakeholders, acknowledging the sponsorship but very clearly articulating that this sponsorship was upheld in accordance with previous contractual obligations and normal operating funds.

Similar companies are issuing letters—both in print and on their websites—that help bring clients into the loop. This includes disclosing financial information, sharing cost-cutting strategies or reassuring clients about the stability of the organization. With Internet usage increasing all the time, clients can find almost anything they need or want to know about your company so it’s best if they can get that information directly from you.

Solicit Feedback and Respond Accordingly.

Marketing is quickly becoming less one-dimensional. Social media sites have created a two-way process that engages a brand and its clients. This presents a great opportunity to reach out to clients and find out what’s on their minds. Instead of trying to shape the conversation, you can let someone else start the conversation and then respond. This type of communication builds client engagement and good will between you and your stakeholders, particularly if you are able to respond in a timely and genuine fashion.

Demonstrate Values and Empathy.

Times are tough for just about everyone right now. One important way to further connect with clients is by showing them you understand. This type of empathy can be demonstrated and delivered through special offers and promotions. Wachovia has just announced free portfolio reviews on Tuesday and Thursday evenings to help ease worries and address questions about retirement accounts, saving for college education, or money lost in portfolios. These reviews are open to the general public, regardless of whether the consumer works with Wachovia or not. This type of value-added service helps to support the company’s values while in turn offering something to the public.

The Role of Online Video.

When it comes to portraying genuine passion and credibility, there is perhaps no better medium than video. Video has an emotional power that cannot easily be achieved in print. Furthermore, video allows you to share the personalities of many service brands most valuable asset—it’s people.

For those organizations not yet experimenting with video, the time has come. Clients don’t just want to hear from you, they want to see you. As they seek out information on the web, studies have shown that users prefer watching a short video to reading lengthy content. Perhaps even more important, Google and similar search engines will rank pages with video higher than they will pure text pages. In a time when so many are rethinking who they do business with, you can’t afford to not be easily found on the web.

In a few years, the business world will look back at those that gained and lost in this environment. It will not be surprising that the winners will be those who strived for communicating and instilling trust.

FORECAST:



Heavy rains are raising water levels of rivers, streams and tributaries

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Defined channel strategy

Multi-Channel Strategies: Harmony or Headache?

By Dan Logan

"The distribution side of selling life insurance and mutual fund investments is what drives the business....Product advantage is not sustainable—we all look at each other's regulatory filings and reverse-engineer each other's products. The whole game is who can build the best distribution capacity."

John DesPrez III, CEO, John Hancock, Boston Business Journal, May 16, 2008

Whether you agree with the above quote or not, if you're in the business of selling insurance or financial services you know a big key to success lays in how you reach your customer. And you probably also know there are almost too many ways to do it. You can market to them directly. You can build your own retail network. You can get on the menu of banks or you can reach out to independent financial advisors, hoping they'll recommend you to their clients.

For many companies, these choices can be a bit overwhelming. But in an industry where it's hard to differentiate your product for very long, your competitive advantage is less about what you sell than how you sell it. Understanding the pros and cons of these distribution channels, and how to interact with them, becomes crucial. Some channels—like the ones you can control such as direct, online or a captive sales force—are fairly straightforward. But for most financial services companies a lot of sales are made through a third party and managing the relationship becomes key to success.

The first thing to remember is, often, the customers you want to reach have a deeper relationship with their advisor, broker or banker than they ever will with you. To get that advisor or bank to recommend your product you must understand that referrals are a personal endorsement and making a recommendation puts their reputation on the line. That is why it is critical to earn their trust. They need to feel comfortable with what you're selling before they'll sell it on your behalf. This means a few things:

- *Treat them as a partner, or even as a client, because that's exactly what they are.*
- *Be easy to do business with. Ask the advisor what you can do to help them. Give them all the support and materials they need to close the sale, and afterwards, follow through on everything you promise the end customer. You can't risk undermining an advisor's integrity, or make their job more difficult than it needs to be, because they'll go elsewhere and take their clients with them.*
- *Be prepared to take a back seat; don't let your branding and messaging overwhelm theirs. The people who buy financial services through an independent advisor do so because they trust that advisor's independence. They're likely more interested in what their advisor has to say about your product than what you do. Respect that, and let the advisor do the talking.*

Another thing to remember is that these channels compete with one another, and you need to be as open and transparent with each of them as possible. If you play favorites, or are perceived as playing favorites, you could find doors being closed to you. Also remember that different kinds of channels take different approaches to win customers' business. Banks often focus on helping customers manage or minimize credit risk. Insurers think about renewable premiums as well as risk management. For fund companies, the game is increasing assets. You likely have products that fit each of these approaches, the challenge is in fine-tuning your communications to speak the right language to each channel. This is as much an internal challenge as anything else, making sure your own people understand the differences between the different channels, and the importance of having a well-defined approach to each.

Sound like a lot of work? It is. But it can provide a lot of payoff, too. The reason to take a multi-channel approach in the first place is because different customers will buy their financial services and insurance in different ways, and you want to be wherever they are.

Sure, some people will just go online and buy what they're looking for off of a website, but many won't. Perhaps they'll look for financial services through their bank, with whom they already have a strong relationship. Or they trust an advisor, who helps them manage an entire portfolio. And they'll base this decision more on the particulars of their own life than on any product you or your competitors are selling. So you want to be available in each of these channels and do what it takes to succeed there.



FORECAST:



Soaking, flooding rains

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Creativity

Can One Dollar Do the Work of Two?

By Dan Logan

Let's face it, there are few shortcuts in life. The book is almost always better than the film. The gym will always trump the Thighmaster. And you've got to know the chords before you can try to solo. That said, what marketer hasn't wondered, "How do I stretch my budget?" What marketing firm hasn't asked, "Is there a way to give my clients a bigger bang for their buck?" There is, and it boils down to one little word: Creativity. Because properly utilized, creativity can get one dollar to do the work of two. Or five. Or ten. Or even a hundred. Simple math is on my side. Let's break it down.

Common sense dictates it usually costs roughly the same to produce and run an effective piece of communication as it does to produce and run an ineffective one. The research costs the same. The media costs the same. The photography, illustration or programming often cost the same. The hours spent huddling in stale conference rooms is the same. **The sole differentiator, then, is the creativity you employ to deliver your message.** Unfortunately, this isn't always as easy as it sounds.

We live in an era of unprecedented "connectedness." Computers and instant messaging keep us tethered to work, family and friends. Cell phones and PDAs alert us to world events or tell us how the markets are doing. Yet the downside of all of this technology is a mind-numbing information fatigue, not to mention the inescapable reality that our target has never had more ways to bypass our messages. To opt out.

On the client side, modern technology allows your competitors to imitate or even duplicate your point of difference almost overnight. So the differentiation isn't always what you say, but how you say it. And that's where creativity comes in. To paraphrase the late Bill Bernbach (the founder of Doyle Dane Bernbach, which produced the wonderful VW ads of the '60s, among other great campaigns): **it's the last legal means you have to gain an unfair advantage over your competition.** Here's a good example:

In 1974, Master Lock did the unthinkable. They bet a huge chunk of their marketing budget on a single television spot on the Super Bowl. This decision flew in the face of conventional media buying wisdom, which naturally would argue for frequency. Making their task even harder, Master Lock's message was a fairly generic one as well: Durability. Price of entry in the category, you say. True. But their commercial delivered it in an unforgettable way: They had a sharpshooter fire at the lock, which stood up to the abuse. A highly memorable and credible product demonstration that made the males of America sit up in their Laz-A-Boys and take notice.

In the end, the only currency that matters in our business is ideas. The more creative you make your communications, the harder they work, and the better chance you'll have of realizing your potential. To quote Bernbach again, **"Nobody counts the number of ads you run; they just remember the impressions you make."**



FORECAST:



Clear skies, full moon tonight

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Facts, brand personality, imagination and passion

The Power of Telling A Good Brand Story

By Jennifer Harrington

About five years ago, while most of us were all wiping bits and pieces of the high tech bubble from our faces, my mother decided to leave the world of business and apply her skills to pursuing her passion: writing. At the time this seemed a crazy departure from all that she knew. But as I have watched her explore writing and translate many of her memories and experiences into prose, I gained a much deeper appreciation for the power of a good story and its unique ability to hold a more meaningful place in our increasingly cluttered minds. The acclaimed screenwriting coach and luminary on storytelling, Robert McKee, put it well when he said:

"Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact." Likewise, clear and articulate brand stories have become the currency of building profitable relationships in a very cluttered marketplace. We live in a world without a lot of white space. It rings particularly true when we view ads in the elevator, hear news about US Airways selling sponsorships of its motion sickness bags, see Dole selling branded fruit, or witness guerilla tactics that irresponsibly leverage space under bridges and in train stations. The fact of the matter is that brands live wherever there is interaction with the market whether through individuals, experience or communications. The goal for most marketing organizations is to find a way to capitalize on these interactions by building a powerful and differentiating story and telling it consistently. Good stories should be based on a solid value proposition and aligned with a company's identity (who you are) and positioning (how you want to be perceived). That said, there is some magic to the process and good brand stories walk the line between strategy and creative. Keeping all of this in mind, there are six tenets to building a good brand story that should serve as guideposts in the process.

1. Begins with the end in mind.

Unlike a novel, brand stories should tie back to business goals and objectives. It's important to ask yourself what you're trying to accomplish and how you are going to track success against the goal. What do you want the market to do once they hear and understand your story? How do you want to be perceived?

2. Speaks directly to the market.

Brand stories that speak squarely to the market are the most compelling and memorable. There probably aren't a lot of people who didn't understand the importance of insurance in planning for the unexpected after watching John Hancock's "Real Life. Real Answers." campaign over the years. We all relate to different characters in different ways, but the message comes through loud and clear. Before you get started take a step back and ask yourself who you are trying to talk to, what are their specific needs, and what do you know about them that you can incorporate into the message.

3. Compelling and believable.

Stories tap into emotions and the things that motivate people. They exploit real life situations which are not always rosy, rational, or tension-free. There are good guys and bad guys. They bare witness to heroes and miracles as well as villains and tragedy. Sound too dramatic? Who could forget more than two decades later the impact of Apple's 1984 campaign: IBM, the resident dictator/villain, was thrown into stark contrast with Apple and its belief that technology should be put into the hands of the everyday person. This story is one that has been told in a compelling way right through to today with the launch of the new iPhone.



4. Based on fact.

Good marketing is not fiction, or shouldn't be. What are the proof points that support your story? If you claim you build a better mousetrap, then you need to be prepared to prove it. This is increasingly harder for service brands as the facts are not typically tied to better, faster, cheaper but rather satisfied clients, a better outcome, or the benefit of targeted expertise for a particular situation.

5. Competitively distinct and not easily copied.

What are the facts and proof points unique to your organization? For many service brands testimonials and case studies can provide the perfect opportunity to own something unique. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts has an interesting campaign running now in which the protagonist, Isabel Perez, retells her battle with breast cancer and the importance of a partner like Blue Cross in helping her to overcome the challenges of the healthcare system and the disease. Interestingly, we only get a glimpse of the story through their broadcast campaign and need to visit the web to find out if Isabel won the battle — along the way we learn more about Blue Cross and the value of a strong HMO partner

6. Can be translated into tools of the trade.

At the end of the day, brand stories need to drive people to action through communications. Powerful brand communications leverage all of the tools at their disposal — not just verbal — but also visual. On the web, through advertising, direct response, and in person. Good stories should come to life through communications and predispose or prompt some action like adding a company to one's "Top 3" list or visiting a website for more information. These are measurable metrics and they are critical in evaluating the power of the story and the success of your efforts. Succinctly stated, a brand story should state who you are, what you do, and how you deliver value

in a unique or better way. It should also convey your personality and give the market a sense of how you behave and respond to the challenges of your industry, your market and the world.



FORECAST:



Cherry blossoms are in bloom!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Thoughtful consideration of various media outlets and a solid understanding of your target audience

Fresh Perspectives on Communication Planning

By Dan Logan

Ten years ago most businesses saw paid advertising, sponsorships and public relations as the two primary tools available to raise awareness and increase consideration for a company, product or service. If a company was operating in the business-to-business space, it might have considered The Wall Street Journal, a few national print magazines like Fortune and Forbes, and some focused trade publications. If it was not a national player, it would have considered the business section of their daily paper, say The Boston Globe or a business weekly, somewhat comparable to the Boston Business Journal. With the possible exception of a few cable news shows or a high-profile new show at the time, such as 60 minutes, television was often considered either too expensive or having too broad an appeal for either a targeted business-to-business message or a message to a high-net worth individual. Sponsorships, whether they were golf or art related, were also valued because they were targeted, and they provide face-to-face cultivation opportunities either locally or nationally.

Today, communication planning is far more complex. Technology has made targeting, measurement, and database management both affordable and a competitive must. The Internet and company websites have both reduced and changed the role that paid media plays in an overall business communication plan. This is not to say that paid media is not important, but within most businesses investing dollars in paid media when your website and database are not optimal could be wasteful. The Internet has changed

the way businesses now think about allocating both human and dollar resources to the marketing process. It has made marketing people more accountable. In effect, it has changed the way we must now make strategic decisions about marketing resources and the role they play.

For instance, a decade ago it was generally accepted that advertising in a business-to-business environment could create awareness and drive a customer or prospect to a seminar or a phone call to a representative. Today, advertising is likely to drive a potential customer to a website or the Internet before they agree to a meeting or seminar. Content on that website as well as other information accessible via Google will either increase or decrease the perceived brand value of one's products and services. Reality is the entire marketing communication process of many businesses has not kept up with the way many of their customers and prospects seek and process information, which influences their purchase decision. Outlined below are five ideas businesses should consider for 2009 if they are trying to make marketing more accountable for business results in the years ahead:

1. Divide your marketing and communication dollars into two buckets. Bucket one is for programs that can impact revenue in the year ahead. Bucket two is for programs that will impact your business and build brand equity down the road. Most marketing people know that the majority of marketing activities take several years to return a yield. How much time and money would you allocate to each of these efforts? Will management in your company understand and support this thinking? For most companies in the business-to-business space, marketing and communication dollars are far more likely to have a long-term impact than a short-term one. Ironically the challenge for many marketing people today is to give a fresh perspective to management on what marketing can and cannot do in the short- and long-term.
2. Change the focus of your communication plan from media and production cost to effectiveness. Measure human time in your calculations. Most business-to-business clients and their agencies spend far too much time debating and analyzing the out-of-pocket cost of various communication plans and far too little time discussing and analyzing the effectiveness. The two reasons for this are it is an old habit and advertising reps are very good at tying up client and agency resources and time. So break the habit. Start talking and listening to your clients and prospects on the value, role, and credibility of various informational sources that influence their brand preference and buying decisions. The human time and effort business puts into this activity will both free up dollars for new communication and marketing activities and reduce dollars going to underperforming and/or over valued media. The effectiveness that marketing and communication efforts can have on both revenue and long-term brand equity, not the size of the budget should be the focus of the dialogue.
3. Address all the opportunities interactive media has to offer. It is no secret that every year dollars and resources are being reallocated from traditional media to interactive media in the aggregate. But what does this mean for your business? What percent of your collective dollars and human resources should you allocate today? What about



three years from now? How will you learn more about your client and prospect preferences? How will you craft your message? How do you integrate public websites, portals, webcasts, podcasts, and html-emails within traditional media? Good marketing and communication people need to know the answers to these questions or have a plan to get the answers. Interactive media has a serious and permanent role in building your company's brand equity. Ultimately, marketing people are accountable for this.

4. Challenge traditional media rules. Be the devil's advocate. Many of the principles of media planning are outdated. We live in a world of multi-tasking, computers, iPods, and cell phones. Do we really know when and who is tuned into our radio or television message? Recently Google announced it would start reporting false click through levels and Tivo has announced they will start identifying for advertisers which commercials are blocked out by their customers. Is a cost per thousand analysis even relevant? How much difference does color in a print ad make? How much is an upfront media buy really worth? How valuable is the NPR audience to your brand-building efforts? With business and trade publications, is there really separation between advertising and public relations or can I buy a few ads and get a good story out on my company?

5. Do not copy your competition when it comes to communication planning. Outthinking your competition is more effective than outspending them. Unlike the sixties, seventies, and early eighties when the amount of money a business spends on network television and national print was often viewed as the key indicator of future sales, size of budget is less relevant today. In the eighties, Apple computers shocked traditional thinkers and launched their product against I.B.M. with a single commercial. David took on Goliath and today only Apple is making computers.

Today Apple has also changed the way we access and listen to music. Again they have a great product and know their market but their approach to marketing and communication has been equally refreshing and different from the pack. This product launch was not dependent on advertising alone. Instead, Apple demonstrated that in today's environment the power of word of mouth, a great retail store service experience, and an ubiquitous campaign could create a level of credibility and loyalty that advertising on its own can seldom achieve.

Innovative communication planning can provide a business with a competitive advantage. Today, credibility is more important than noise if you want to build a sustainable business. What are the most credible media sources in the opinion of your customers?

Yes, a different type of communication approach can take both guts and brains and a true understanding of your target audiences. However, most businesses, regardless of the amount of money they allocated to marketing and media dollars, follow the pack when it comes to communication planning. At the same time, the media choices that influence or inform a customer or prospect today may be different than they were five or ten years ago. Businesses who understand this can truly get more bang for their buck.



FORECAST:



Gusty winds, knots at 20mph

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Clear objectives, a content outline or script and a likeable "meteorologist"

Online Video: Giving Marketing a Powerful Boost

By Dan Logan

" eMarketer reports that in 2008 more than 50% of the US population, 155.2 million people, will watch video online."

Online video is one of the best ways to engage an audience in a sincere and personal way. It represents a shift from targeting consumers via more static media to entering into a more interactive relationship with them. And the numbers are staggering. Video sites have quickly become some of the most highly trafficked sites with consumers watching over 9 billion online videos per month. YouTube and Google are leading the pack but many corporate websites are also realizing the value of video. For those businesses that have yet to embrace the video trend, resistance ranges from concerns about preparing and lighting a set, to the perception that the costs outweigh the benefits. These factors may have held true in the past but are becoming more of a myth as significant advances in technology and techniques have made it possible to effectively reach a huge number of people for a minimal investment of time and money.

Why video enhances your marketing mix. Videos are a great way to bring a service brand to life. Through video, you can convey your culture, talk about your approach to working with clients and share the personalities and people in your organization. Video can also empower you to distribute business news in a timely manner. Consider the increasingly grim financial headlines. It has never been more important to communicate with clients—and quickly and frequently. This is particularly true within financial services but the need to build trust, good will and strong relationships with clients cuts across many industries. It is in times like these that people want to hear from the CEO, their fund manager, or maybe the head of a distribution channel. Video makes this "one to many" type of communication possible and personal.

Here are some important tips to help turn your videos into powerful marketing tools:

Your video must work as content

Don't think of your video as a show, but rather another tool in your arsenal for reaching clients. Use it to distribute highly relevant information, just as you would in print and email communications.

Keep it short

As a general rule, anything longer than two minutes will feel like a very long time for viewers. You have to be mindful of the fact that the average attention span of web users is measured in seconds. If your video serves a marketing purpose, remember that it's just an opportunity to open up a dialogue around your products and services. It shouldn't take the place of the overall sales process. Consider ways to share your videos.

The placement of your videos is critical to whether or not they are viewed

If they are on your corporate website, they shouldn't be tucked away on deeper subpages. If they need to live there, use callouts with links on the homepage to drive users to those pages. You may also look into uploading your video to an online community site like YouTube as a way to increase the audience reach. Safeco Insurance uses YouTube to share quick spots they've created that help educate business owners on the import Monitor and measure your results. Use the basic principles of search engine optimization to help your videos get found. This means creating rich and relevant titles and metadata tags that describe the video. Once users have found your video, look at the analytics to determine what's working, if the videos get forwarded and any other data that measures performance.

To date, many forward-thinking organizations are integrating online video communications into their public relations, corporate communications, and marketing efforts. It is possible that as new technologies emerge, streaming video will become the broadcast medium of choice.



FORECAST:



Gorgeous day, "Pick of the Week"

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Service-driven employees, strong communications and testimonials

What Makes a Company Really Easy to do Business With?

By Dan Logan

Business publications are full of ads that promise that a particular business service provider is easy to do business with. In fact, the provider will offer to solve all your problems whether they pertain to technology support, employee benefits administration or accounting, and save you time, money and hassle. Advertisers know that most prospects are frustrated with how difficult it actually can be to get good hassle-free service from a provider. But the major problem is how does the buyer differentiate companies that simply promise 'ease of doing' business from those that both promise it and deliver it.

Quality initiatives gone astray: the good and the bad

The concept of 'ease of doing business' was the big idea of the early 1990s and was linked to Quality Initiatives and the Malcolm Baldrige Award. Some companies like IBM, FedEx and Fidelity, really understood the concept and delivered on it: they trained their people and designed their business operations based on the needs of clients. IBM stopped pushing computers and focused on business process solutions that would benefit their clients. FedEx understood the importance of getting a package to a place of business early enough in the day to make it relevant. And Fidelity understood the need for their customers to access financial information when they wanted it.

On the other hand, lots of businesses talked about 'ease of doing business' but did not support their positioning. Businesses within the airline, insurance, auto and phone industries made promises about how easy they were to deal with, but their business clients would say they did not have such an experience.

Keeping the promise

Recently we were asked by a bank to gather some input from small business prospects about key drivers in selecting their banking partner. We learned that banking was no different on the 'ease of doing business' component than many other service industries that cater to the small and mid-size business markets. The majority of prospects we talked to expressed considerable degrees of dissatisfaction with their current bank, with particular emphasis on loan approval time. What was surprising was that most of these prospects did not intend to switch banks because it was such a hassle and they were unsure how they could find a bank that was actually easy to do business with.

The bottom line is that if your business really wants to excel at 'being easy to do business with' not only do you have to adopt the best practices of companies like IBM, Fidelity and FedEx on training and business processes, but you also must come up with a compelling story to get a prospect to switch from their current provider. To succeed at this requires patience, passion for excellence and the realization that it may not generate immediate short-term profit. Companies that are easy to do business with were not built overnight and their leadership knew this.

Keys to success in becoming easy to do business with

For 16 years we have worked on or talked to companies that have focused considerable efforts on becoming easy to do business with. We have observed five common behaviors across most of these companies.

Understand what makes your customer/prospect frustrated

What does your customer consider the biggest hassle in dealing with your business? What are their pet peeves and what are you doing about it? If you cannot answer these questions then you might question whether your business is truly committed to being easy to do business with. The experience you offer a customer face-to-face, over the phone or via the web all impart the 'ease of doing business' score, so to speak. There is probably a cluster of pet peeves among key customers.

Prepare your employees to anticipate and solve hassles as perceived by customers

You cannot be effective if your associates are not properly trained in both understanding the customer and solving their problems. People who work at health insurance and employee benefit companies need to know the characteristics of the employee population of the business they are serving if they want to help the HR person responsible for selecting their firm. In the hospitality business, employees need to be empowered to solve complaints on the spot, even if this means some limited financial commitment. In the financial industry, resolving the exact time and accuracy of a transaction is crucial, and if this means admitting a mistake on the spot, so be it.



Recognize the changing benchmarks of customer expectations

Customers are always seeing innovation when it comes to eliminating hassle. ATM machines made cash available 24/7. Wireless made portable computers more desirable. Websites gave us access to work status and delivery dates. From a business customer perspective, innovation is rampant when it comes to ease of doing business and the expectation is that a business that offers a service can and should learn from everything that is going on around them, regardless of their industry.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

One of the biggest mistakes a company can make when they commit to hassle-free service is to under-communicate. Through research we have seen either poor or inaccurate communication as the single biggest reason customers perceive a company as not easy to do business with. There is a big difference between communicating to all your stakeholders that you are committed to your positioning and over-promising. Great service companies need great technology, perfected business processes, and to understand the importance of people talking to people. The better trained and informed stakeholders are and the more transparent business is the easier it will be for both clients and associates to be effective and satisfied.

Let your customers speak on your behalf

Convincing a prospect that you are easy to do business with is best done by your current clients. Commit your business to client input on your performance and ask them for references, referrals, testimonials and case studies. When it comes to picking a service provider, most prospects are going to do their homework. Advertising and sales presentations that are not based on actual customer experience may create awareness and interest, but they will not generate profitable long-term clients.

'Easy to business with' should not be an empty promise. To stay true to your word you must empower your company with the knowledge and ability to anticipate and respond to customer's problems. The process may be long and hard but it will be worth it (read: long-term success) to stick it out. Delivering on the promise will really make your company stand out against the competition.



FORECAST:



Threat of thundershowers and a tornado watch is in effect

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

New approaches and a tolerance for some risk

Conquering Uncertainty with Innovation in Today's New World

By Dan Logan

Uncertain economic times require firms like Trinity Communications to focus on exploring new ideas, allowing us to better advise our clients in their efforts to adapt, compete and grow their businesses. Recognizing that some the best ideas come from the new and the different, we recently spent the day at the 4th annual Ideas Boston Conference—a full-day event that featured the work of a broad range of innovators across all imaginable fields of research and business. With sixteen speakers, we were exposed to new ideas, concepts and technologies from science, visual arts, public policy and education thought leaders. The ideas were thought provoking and more importantly they have relevance to the ways we can help companies evolve their brands and improve marketing performance.

Below are some common themes from the event that we would like to share:

1. Asking a Different Question

Old problems can be solved when you ask a new or different question. Architect Sheila Kennedy explained that electricity is delivered through wires that are embedded in our walls, and require a centralized electrical grid. She then asked if this was the best and only delivery method. Through the nonprofit The Portable Light, Sheila has created new ways to deliver renewable power and light to the developing world in a textile. Portable Light provides renewable solar power to charge a cell phone and provide bright, white light to support community based education and household economic development.

What can we do in business to ask different questions? Can we improve the types of questions being asked by reaching out and collaborating more across functional roles?.

2. Viewing the World Through a New Lens

With greater server capabilities, all companies can collect and retain data—so much so that there are entire businesses dedicated to storing this data. But rarely is anything done with this collected data. Martin Wattenberg is a new media artist who looks at information visualization and focuses on analyzing data in new and insightful ways. By tapping into the social security administrations database of U.S. baby names since the 1920s, he created a site that allows you to see naming trends. Seeing the spike in popularity of certain names and specific letters can start to tell a story about changes in society.

If ideas are nothing more than a new combination of elements, are we limiting ourselves by linear viewing of data? For example, what if you look at data on customer behavior on websites—not just your site, but all sites to learn more about them? Much is often said about the importance of knowing your customer, but how hard do we really work at it?

3. Risking Controversy

David Rattner is a leader in scarless surgery – surgery done through natural body orifices with no external incisions. This non-invasive surgery has the potential to significantly reduce pain, scarring and recovery times. David spoke of the lack of reception of innovation within medical and non-medical communities that have occurred in medical history. With the benefit of hindsight, much of that controversy looks foolish. Forging through it, however, takes incredible confidence.

In our own business, how are we recognizing and supporting new ideas? Just because something isn't broken does not mean it couldn't be fixed or improved upon. Are you doing more communications online and considering other avenues within advertising and social media? These are great opportunities to deepen connections with your target audiences.



4. Listening for What Isn't Being Said

Daniel Schrag, a geochemist, spoke of the impact of global warming and opportunity available through alternative energy resources to slow down some of these events. He shared insight into the scientific mindset – geochemists could report with a 95% confidence interval that the polar caps would melt, but they didn't report what they worried about but didn't know – how quickly it would happen.

What isn't being said in meetings? Good marketing decisions need to be rooted in facts and you need to listen to a broad base of experts and insights. For example, the activity of the financial market over the last six weeks had been largely anticipated, but the timing and scale caught us all by surprise. We've seen that our clients that regularly talked about this were ahead of the curve when it came to responding.

5. Taking Risks

John Maeda, the new president of the Rhode Island School of Design, shared his own non-linear career path and insights into his leadership style at RISD. This is an individual who has made unexpected decisions. From MIT student to art student, from visual artist to commercial technology-aided artist, and finally to academic leader, John has never followed a predictable path. And now he continues to look at new ways of doing things. Embracing change, he recognizes that technology will force the flattening of traditional hierarchy. And so he is opening up communications to utilize blogs, Facebook and other interactive social media to connect the entire community.

As communications happen faster, we will all have to take some new risks in what we say. Sometimes getting the message out quickly is more important than getting it perfect. Speaking to client concerns in these uncertain financial times, for example, needs to happen sooner and more often. Utilizing the newest technologies can help, but your mindset and sense of control also have to adapt.



FORECAST:



Drought conditions, rainfall desperately needed

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

SEO, SEO, SEO!

What Good is a Store Without Shoppers: Strategies for Driving Traffic to Your Website

By Dan Logan

By now, every bank has a website. Some may have even gone through several iterations of websites. Going forward, many will start to focus their energy on driving more and more people to their sites. There are lots of tools out there to help raise awareness and drive traffic, but what combination is best?

As marketers, we always preach the importance of keeping your site continuously updated with good content. This is probably still paramount to other strategies. But again, good content is only good if someone reads it and can extract value from it. Furthermore, does good content live solely on your site, or might it be worth exploring social media sites, blogs and other trends?

Given there are so many options out there, and many of them are fairly new, below are some simple things to consider as you work to optimize your website:

Inbound Links

Increasing the number of inbound links into your site helps search engines feel more confident ranking your site higher in an index. In many ways, the more inbound links to your site, the more credibility you have with the search engines and even consumers. The key here is to have a good volume of links that are coming from sites somewhat aligned with your own content or offering. One easy way to accomplish this is to inquire about having your website listed on any association or group sites of which your bank is a member.

Paid and Organic Search

Paid search is considered one of the best performing strategies when it comes to supporting online growth. One of the most common forms of paid search is pay-per-click advertising (PPC), in which companies will determine and then bid on keywords that will resonate best with their target demographic. The more popular the words, the more expensive this strategy can get. It's important to select keywords that match the way financial consumers search. For example, it is far more useful to bid on words such as 'home equity loans' or 'mortgages' versus the name of your bank.

If you have a very limited budget, you can still optimize your site by applying some basic principles of organic search. Similar to paid search, organic search requires you to give some thought to keywords. With this strategy, the title tags are usually the most powerful. Title tags should be given to each page and should connect to the actual content on the page.

Online Advertising

According to a recent Nielson survey, the financial services industry outspent all other industries in online advertising in 2008, with retail goods and services close behind. But now the effects of the recession are just starting to show. Many banks are struggling with the most effective solution for online ad spending, so as not to pay for any waste. Despite this, online is expected to continue on its path of outperforming traditional media. Banks should be giving serious consideration to placing online ads on sites that are meaningful to their business and are aligned with budgets, target audiences and overall objectives.

Social Media

Marketing has started to shift away from a one-way dialogue and into more two-way exchanges between consumers and brands. Tremendous results can be achieved by banks using social networking sites as a way to engage more with customers and prospects, while differentiating themselves from the competition. Banks that have a solid understanding of the local market are well positioned to be part of a conversation with their consumers versus bigger bank brands that have for the most part lost substantial trust and credibility with the consumer.

Conclusion

Regardless of economic conditions, consumer behavior continues to move online. Therefore it is imperative that you employ all or some of the above strategies in 2009 to capture that online audience. Bank marketers who do this well will see a competitive advantage despite a year filled with such uncertainty.



FORECAST:



Clear skies

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Strong messaging supported by proof points

Truth in Advertising: Supporting Your Claim

By Dan Logan

We all know that a critical messaging component of a good ad, brochure, or website is to answer the question "Why should I do business with you?" While this is always important it is even more so for service brands. It's one thing to switch toothpaste brands with the hope of whiter teeth. After 90 days if you do not see a difference you are out \$10. But the process for evaluating a new healthcare plan, 401k plan, or technology platform is different and the stakes are much higher. If after 90 days the technology you implemented does not work as advertised you could be out more than your money - you could be out of a job or out of business. Good business people have learned to be skeptical and they will do their due diligence before they make a purchase decision.

It's easy to underestimate the importance of determining the benefit or solution a firm should highlight in its communications and providing evidence that supports the claim effectively. So how can you best support the claim that you're faster, cheaper, better, smarter, and easier to do business with than the other guy? How do you demonstrate to your business customers or prospects that you respect their intelligence, are sensitive to their time, and truly understand their business need? How do you credibly demonstrate that your product or service can help them grow their business, reduce costs, or increase customer satisfaction? Here are five suggestions that can help.

1. Review the competition - in terms of message and noise level - and put yourself in the shoes of the customer trying to make a decision.

Spend 30 minutes looking at print ads in business publications or trade journals and then look at the websites of some of these companies. What do you see? Who do you believe and why? For example in the Wall Street Journal this week you may have noticed an ad by US Trust. The ad talks about the mission of the company to deliver top-tier performance and innovation that is unbiased and in the best interests of clients. So how are they different than any other wealth management company and why should someone give them their hard earned money to invest? Because it's the company's mission? Because they claim they will act in my best interests? Where is the evidence to support this claim? Can you find it online and can a representative from the company answer this question if challenged?

On the other hand when I see Harvard Pilgrim ads in the Globe, the Boston Business Journal, or on television I am given evidence that Harvard Pilgrim is dedicated to driving down the cost of health insurance by proactively helping people live healthier lives. The evidence is everywhere. Benefits like \$150 credit for joining a healthcare club are valuable and effective. I see the facts online and I see it in my office when associates walk in and ask for the form to apply for the credit. As a business owner and decision maker I believe Harvard Pilgrim is demonstrating to me that they respect my intelligence, my time, and my focus on managing healthcare costs.

2. Ask yourself for the most credible evidence you have to support your claim.

If a medical device company wants a physician or nurse to recommend its product to a patient, what evidence do they give to support their recommendation? In most instances evidence is not as simple as "whiter teeth." If you want a physician to purchase your device you need to offer evidence on a variety of claims that cut across safety, better outcomes, and profit to their practice. Evidence of performance needs to be based on scientific fact, not clever before-and-after shots or deceptive testimonials that promise more hair, less fat, or freedom from pain.

The criteria for "credibility" vary a bit from industry to industry. Technology companies with an enterprise level offering need to provide evidence that they really do offer a better solution that is secure, scalable, and cost-effective in getting to the end benefit. Professional service firms may have to describe a better process, more experienced people, or expertise in a particular vertical with credible testimonials to support their story.

3. Choose evidence that is visually and verbally memorable, distinct, and relevant.

More often than not a businessperson, unlike an individual consumer, has to explain and justify a decision to make a big purchase or switch providers. The evidence they need must be brief, easy to understand, and true. Don't underestimate the benefit of a simple visual or clean statement. For example, Wilmer Hale in a recent ad claims to be "counsel of choice for mergers and acquisitions." The evidence they provide is the fact that they have done more than 900 M&A transactions with a total value in excess of \$500 billion since 2000. The numbers 900 and the \$500 billion capture attention. A firm looking for advice in this area might at least visit their website or call for more information.



4. Position evidence so that it is highly visible.

A source of constant amazement is how often the most compelling evidence to support a claim is not emphasized in an ad or highlighted on a website but buried where no one can or will find it. Businesses often overestimate the relative importance of their product or service and how long a prospect will give them to tell their story. If you have good evidence to support your claim say it and show it early and often in the marketing, communication, and sales process. Do not leave it as a big reveal in the end – chances are you have already lost the audience.

5. Make it easy for clients who have experienced your service to quickly recount key support points if they were asked for a referral from a friend.

There is nothing more credible than a satisfied client making a referral. We all know from experience that when making a referral you rarely say “Call XYZ.” As the referrer you often feel compelled to support the referral – what do you point to? How do you support your recommendation? As a company, it is critical that the points provided in marketing are aligned with the actual experience of clients and that they believe them.

I was recently asked for a referral for an executive search firm. In my recommendation it was easy for me to turn to a firm with a truly unique process, a commitment to turning over a lot of stones, and deep industry expertise. Not just because that is what they say in their communications but also because that is what was promised and I experienced it when I worked with them.

Your company may offer better pricing, expertise and experience, but the burden of proof is on marketing and communicating the evidence. Clear, believable messaging is needed to support your claims and encourage prospects to look further into your company and eventually choose you for business. Keep the customer in mind, examine the evidence and make it visible.



FORECAST:



Clouds giving way to abundant sunshine

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Distinct, compelling creative ideas

Breakthrough Creative: 10 Rational Criteria for Evaluating Ideas

By Dan Logan

In today's overly cluttered marketplace, breakthrough creative has become the Holy Grail for many organizations because it is tied to the belief that with good creative thinking comes greater impact and awareness of your company and its services. This is particularly true in the business to business environment when trying to translate an intangible, complex story into one that is simple, easy to understand and memorable.

To get started, you need to share knowledge about your company with a creative team that enables them to link believable proof points to the foundation of their concept. Then you can incorporate creative tools such as, imagery, copy, and music. This is where many companies think they have arrived at their breakthrough creative. Not the case. What's missing is the most important step in the process—imagination. Imagination is most often found within truly talented and experienced creative professionals. Imagination takes a creative idea to another level. And ultimately becomes the seed for new business opportunities.

The following case studies demonstrate successful examples of breakthrough creative.

Liberty Mutual: The one insurance company that proactively helps people live safer, more secure lives. A message delivered with humanity, passion, expertise and a twist of visual humor. A distinct message that changed buyers' perceptions about the business insurance industry and persuaded various target markets to think differently about Liberty Mutual.

Millennium Pharmaceuticals: Breakthrough science. Breakthrough medicine. A biopharmaceutical company that differentiates itself by striving to make a difference with innovative, breakthrough research that leads to breakthrough medicine and results that have an impact on people's lives and their most serious illnesses. A message delivered with an impactful, cutting edge tone of tension, motivation, inspiration, humanity, empowerment and demonstrating the ability to make a difference.

Apple: Think different. A company that puts people in front of computers. A relevant distinct message delivered to the creative audience, depicted through brilliant, creative people communicating graphic capabilities and design sensibility.

Breakthrough creative is in fact critical to the success of your efforts. And, unlike a mythical quest, it is attainable for those who believe in its value. There is no doubt that those who covet the creative process will link the roots of any breakthrough idea to experience, creativity, innovation and imagination but there are a series of rational criteria that anyone can and should use in evaluating not just their communications, but also the ideas behind them. Here are ten rational criteria for evaluating ideas on breakthrough creative.

1. Always based on strategic thinking with a solid value proposition.
2. Must demonstrate a profound understanding of the target audience at a given point in time.
3. Must strike the right balance between being compelling and relevant.
4. Must masterfully leverage the tools of the trade – word, pictures, color, sound, etc.
5. Does not need to be rational, linear or tension-free.
6. Must be believable.
7. Must have the power to make someone think differently and change perceptions about a product or service.
8. Must be a big enough idea to be communicated consistently across multiple mediums.
9. Can be tied to the success of meeting business goals and objectives.
10. Is competitively distinct and cannot be easily copied.





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About Trinity Communications

For over 15 years, we've been helping clients realize their true potential with smart thinking and creative ideas. Our experience cuts across a wide variety of activities including brand planning and positioning, identity and collateral development, advertising, direct marketing and lead generation, product naming and launches, channel and market segmentation strategies and web development.

