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READY, SET, GO?

Ulrike André questions whether marketing and advertising really hit the target

A few weeks back some of my colleagues from the marketing department here at Stahls' met for a brainstorming session to get ready for upcoming product launches and trade shows.

I like these brainstorming sessions a lot. In these sessions, we share and discuss, collaborate, enticing one another to look at things differently and hopefully becoming better marketers. In the end we become more efficient in marketing our products and services.

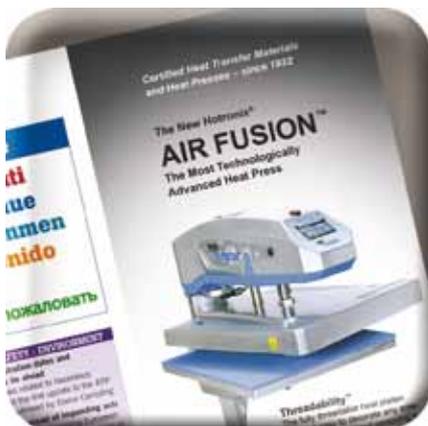
There is so much information about marketing available today and I continuously see it is very hard, if not impossible, to keep track of all the many available tools which inspired me to choose my topic today.

Most of us know our businesses well. We know our industry, we know what we are offering, and we know our limits. In addition, we also know who are customers are, how we want our products to be promoted. But the question still remains - are we reaching them? Are our marketing efforts paying off? Is our ROI (return on investment) satisfactory or even exceeding expectations? Do we have all the tools in place that can help achieve our sales goals - efficiently?

DO YOU HAVE A MARKETING PLAN?

As I mentioned above, it is difficult to keep up with the many marketing choices available to us. And, if the abundance of available tools, websites, social networks, language does not overwhelm us, then the rate at which we are being introduced to these novel technologies will certainly do its job and keep our heads scratching.

One can break it down, however, into a few categories and take it from there.



Print advertising speaks to all the senses

Depending on your product or customer you are looking to attract, geographic area, business model - one might work better for you than another.

PRINT ADVERTISING

I know many are being left to think that anything printed on paper is not as effective as the world wide web but the fact is that we still very much need all that print offers.

Newspapers and magazines across the globe are 'going digital' or worse - closing their doors. However, for many people, a newspaper, magazine, or brochure is the only marketing that speaks to all our senses. They are dimensional. Reading something printed tends to make us concentrate differently than reading online. Many tend to take (make) more time when holding a printed version versus its electronic counterpart. Printed advertising can capture audience wonderfully. And, besides, there are still many of us that enjoy reading printed pieces. In some cases, print advertising might be the only way to reach certain customer groups.

Concentrating on local publications, such as printed place mats in a restaurant, church bulletins, school and club newsletters, direct mail and hand-outs can be just as effective when trying to introduce a business to a village or smaller city. Printed advertising helps get the word out and you can make it as lavish or as simple as you want, keeping a very close eye on the cost involved and the ROI and your local audiences likes and dislikes.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

In addition to reading, people still listen to the radio. Call me old-fashioned, but a spot and interview on the local radio station can do wonders for your business. A friend of mine started his little shop about a year ago in a small town with sparse infrastructure. He is very creative but had a hard time spreading the word that his shop even existed. He contacted the local radio station and told them how he had personalised T-shirts for a local non-profit group and that was all it took. The newspaper picked up the story - people started talking about him and traffic to his shop blossomed.

Local and Cable TV work very similarly; if you have something to say, if you have a message, a story, a cause ... chances are that a news station would like to talk about it and that the news, your news, will spread fast.



YouTube goes hand-in-hand with a company's website

ONLINE AND WEB MARKETING

In 1984 the number of Internet devices was approximately 1,000. This year the number has risen to more than 9.8 billion and by 2020 will reach a predicted 28 billion (source: IMS Reseach, 4 October 2012). Your website is, quite possibly, the most important tool there is. This is your 'split second introduction' to the world. SEO (search engine optimisation), great photography, and smart copy are of utmost importance to capture the shrinking attention span of site visitors.

To market your products and services successfully, a good website is only part of the equation. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, Xing, and w-k-w go hand-in-hand with a website. There is an abundance of forums and associations available that can help get the word out as well.

My colleague, Josh Ellsworth (cadcutdirect.com), has been posting videos on YouTube for several years now. His creativeness, personability and knowledge of heat presses and consumables have helped him create a following of people interested in what he has to say. Josh is now recognised as a trusted expert and the products he suggests hold and deliver what he promises.

Mobile advertising, with the ever-growing number of users and technological advancements of smart phones is, by comparison still in its infancy. The rate at which this segment grows is astounding. I attended a seminar last month and the statistics given were mind-blowing - global mobile will exceed fixed desktop access by 2013/2014 (source: *infographic*). Cisco's 2010-2015 Data Usage Projection claims it already has. One in three searches is mobile

today. Samir Janveja, Strategic Partner Manager at Google, participated in a webinar this summer sharing that after looking up a local business on a smart phone, 60% of users called the business while a staggering 58% visited the very store. Best make sure your website is compatible to be viewed using smart phones, tablets and the like.

We are in an industry that supplies tools, products and services for people to set themselves apart. We all want to leave our mark; online advertising promotes and spreads our message across the globe – instantaneously. Our hope is that our idea, picture, upload, share, tweet, like, connect, goes viral.

TRACKING AND TRACKING METHODS

Having the right tracking tools in place will help you determine if you have the right media mix, if you are sending the right message. Furthermore, it gives you vital information about the quality of leads and helps you allocate monies from your budget.

There is an abundance of tracking methods available. CRM (Customer Relationship Management) might not be practical or feasible to implement for smaller businesses but is a must for larger sized businesses in order to keep track and grow.

Below is an excerpt of what is available and obtainable for most – time is the most important investment you will have to make!

Google Analytics and Google Tracking Tools are probably the most popular, extremely user friendly, and did I mention – free of charge?

Setting up the account is easy as child's play and once you get started you can get lost with all the options you can utilise to perfect your website, eComms, and all other

advertising strategies that you wanted to measure but did not know how to. The Google URL builder allows you to track any campaign in place, whether on paper, in print or in the virtual world.

Measuring the ROI of our advertising monies is finally less tedious and clearly no longer impossible to do. It's another huge step closer to a business plan, marketing plan making sense and being optimised.

QR CODE (QUICK RESPONSE CODE)

It seems like these little black and white squares just showed up over night. They are free, easy to create, their open rates can be tracked easily and they are fun, to boot. All one needs is a smart phone to 'translate' the QR code – that's it. For someone who has a video to share, or a landing page with more information and a message to convey, a QR code might be the perfect tool. Add the benefit of guiding people to your website, enhancing visibility and, hopefully, generating so much interest that will translate into sales.

READY, SET, GO

Seth Godin speaks of 'whisperers' in his book 'Purple Cow'. A whisperer is a person who, due to his/her own experiences with a product or service, recommends it to his/her friend. This might possibly be the best, most convincing, marketing there is. Chances are I will trust a friend's opinion or experience more than an anonymous advert from a company I had no dealing with until that point.

In order for us to generate our own whisperer following, we must have vision and a clear concept in place. One, that has to be changed, adjusted and tweaked on a continuous basis until we get it just right –



Free and easy to create, QR codes' open rates can be tracked easily

realising that these 'adjustments' are most likely going to be part of an on-going effort in order to meet the latest, fast changing tastes, likes and demands.

Being present in the right places, utilising the right mix of Medias requires a lot of work, time and money, granted. The tools available to track and measure our work are making it easier and easier to be most precise helping us to keep focus and grow. And they are readily available now. What are you waiting for? ■

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