



What your marketing counsel should tell you—but won't

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By Patrick Byers, Guest Columnist

What would your marketing counsel say if they weren't afraid of losing your business? Here are some hard truths they probably should tell you:

The external challenges are overwhelming.

Your marketing probably won't be seen or heard. The average consumer is hit with over 3,000 marketing messages a day. Your words and images aren't just competing with your competitors—they are competing with Nike, Starbucks and Paris Hilton. What are the chances your ad, postcard or email will register in that environment? Customers are more cynical than ever. If you say you have great customer service, they'll wonder why you think you have to say it. They've been interrupted so many times—in so many ways—they've developed meaningful new relationships with their wastebasket, spam filter, delete key and TiVo.

Compounding the problem.

Too many companies have set unrealistic growth expectations and budgets. We often meet with companies that want to invest nothing—and expect annual growth of 30 percent or more. Just last week we had a company tell us they wanted to grow from just over \$4 million to \$50 million in sales in three years.

This would be tough—but not impossible with the right planning and budget. We proposed a realistic amount

of planning to get them on their way. They decided to develop a cheap brochure . . . in-house. Short-term reactive marketing like this results in increased costs for printing, media and production—and often makes for disjointed, poorly executed marketing communications. We won't spend our clients' dollars on drive-by marketing. You should insist on the same for yourself.

The cornerstone of great communications.

How is a consumer supposed to pick you if they can't tell what you are, who you are for, how you are different and why that matters to them? If your communications don't communicate those things succinctly, you're doomed.

Sometimes, the casting of your marketing team is the biggest obstacle to getting good marketing done. Most companies rely upon external resources. These resources' recommendations may be based on what they need to sell, not what you need to move the needle.

So, what can you do about it?

First, become a company that works from strategy. Your marketing should be based on powerful consumer insights—how they get their information and how they make their buying decisions. Learn their needs and wants. What makes them tick. Then give it to them.

Hire marketers who only work from strategy.

Planning done right will result in a powerful, unique position for your

company. It will become the heart and soul of your external communications. And your employees will begin to sing from the same songbook.

Work with a firm that offers the full breadth of marketing disciplines. You want a firm that will make recommendations based on your needs, not theirs.

Be bold and brave with your communications. As David Ogilvy said, "You cannot bore someone into buying your product."

If your marketing counsel isn't telling you what you need to hear, are they looking out for you or their retainer? If it's the latter, hire someone who is not afraid to push you to what's necessary to succeed.

All that's at stake is your company.

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