

as featured in
MINNESOTA BUSINESS
 LEADERSHIP • OPPORTUNITY • GROWTH

KNOW-HOW > Expert advice for business leaders

Educating the Market

Taking a disciplined approach to marketing communications

While most companies are pretty good at knowing what their customers want, not all are as good at meaningfully communicating to the outside world why they are any better than their competitors.

BY JOHN HARDEN

The reality is that the quality of the product or service a company provides doesn't always match the perception of the marketplace. Even if a company sells a great product, such excellence means little if the company can't communicate or tangibly demonstrate the greater value they've created.

Yet if the market accurately perceives the superiority of an organization, that company can dominate its market. To be successful, a company needs to articulate internally why somebody buys what they sell, where they could innovate in ways that really matter to prospects, and then determine how to make those advantages obvious to prospects in order to get increased sales for the same or less investment than is currently being made.

This requires an acute appreciation and understanding of the basic human desire to try to get the best overall deal possible in terms of price and value. You need to determine what is important to your prospects, inform them about what represents the best value, and then support your claims as to why they should buy from you. Then if your message is communicated in a believable and compelling way so that your prospect pays attention and actually believes what you say, you might just get them to take the most important step — action.


Critical to earning this desired outcome is your ability to facilitate your prospect's decision-making process by building a solid case, and lowering the risk of trying your product or service. This is especially true in a world with so many choices. When you build a case properly, it warrants separation and distinction, and you automatically build a brand image worthy of praise, attention and a greater share of the market. This is important because otherwise why would anyone choose you over your competitors who can, right or wrong, at least say they do the same things you do?

The good news is that this can be accomplished by first finding out what prospects need to feel comfortable buying what you sell. Ask them how they are most receptive to receiving this information, and only then determine what the most effective vehicles are to carry your message. Often this causes a dramatic shift in the tactical portion of your marketing and advertising to reflect the way customers and prospects are most receptive to receiving your message in today's world. And often this results in significant savings as your strategic messages become more targeted and impactful.

The project plan you create to implement your tactical strategy is critical to getting a solid return on your investment, and must include measurable deliverables, timelines and expected outcomes throughout all customer touch points. To ensure success, communication between impacted areas must be on a regular basis, include progress made the previous week, and clearly communicate



expectations for the following week. Without this, the results you expect are not likely to happen.

On the other hand, if accomplished, you will have the ability to communicate why you are better than your competitors in meaningful ways, you will build a market perception worthy of your company that nobody else can copy, and you will create and communicate greater value to the marketplace. The potential rewards are many — more sales, a shorter sales cycle, less competitive bidding, greater retention, lower sales and marketing costs, and better margins for years to come. 

John Harden (jharden@hardeninc.com) is president of Harden & Associates (www.hardeninc.com), a Minneapolis-based provider of strategic marketing and management counsel.

Reprinted with permission of the publisher. ©2005 BBN Publishing, all rights reserved. Any reproduction of this document is strictly prohibited. For reprints call 952-844-0400.