

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

May 2004

Create "Top-of-Mind" Awareness for Your Top-of-the-Line Products by SBC Staff

"If you are writing about baloney, don't try to make it a Cornish hen, because that is the worst kind of baloney there is. Just make it darned good baloney." — Leo Burnett

The opportunity to market a company is always present; the challenge is seizing these opportunities. Marketing serves many purposes: it informs customers about your company, educates them about your products, and lets them know about changes to your business. In short, marketing is how a company presents itself to the world, so it's important to constantly manage this impression and not wait for a formal occasion to tell people who you are and what you do.

Start-up companies wait for the day that they can begin their own marketing campaigns. However, there is no reason to wait to start what companies would consider a "traditional" marketing program. This view of marketing is too narrow. A better way for companies of all sizes to think of marketing is not as a formal program, but as part of everything that a company does—every product completed, every letter written and every phone call returned.

WTCA Past President Roger Gibbs touched on this point in his [August 2000 Editor's Message](#): "All truss manufacturers have specific strengths and talents within their organization that are different from the competition. You need to capture those strengths and sell them to both your current and potential customers." He challenged readers to consider the following questions:

- Is my company's strength in its sales staff? Do we have the expertise to give the correct take-off in the field? Can we give the customer a price on the project the same day? Can we size the correct hangers and beams? Can we assist in providing customers with structural solutions? Can we create value for the customer?
- Is my company's strength in its design department? Can we give the most efficient layout for the job to make the framing job easier? Do we optimize the best use of lumber? Do we meet with the customer to go over the preliminary placement plans and designs?
- Is my company's strength in manufacturing? Are we using the best grade of lumber available, such as MSR or MEL? Do our trusses have tight joints, correct plate embedment and four square sides on the lumber? Do we have automated equipment in our manufacturing process that makes producing a high quality product easier?
- Is my company's strength in the delivery of its product? Do we meet the delivery date we confirmed with the customer? Are our drivers professional and courteous? Do we have any breakage when we deliver? Are our delivery trucks well marked and clean to further the company's professional image?

All of these are questions are valuable to consider, so that you can make sure you emphasize your strengths when marketing. Once you have isolated the areas on which to focus, it's time to explore some different marketing tactics.

CREATING AWARENESS THROUGH ADVERTISING

Advertising is especially important when your company is not well known. It is an effective way to establish an identity in the market and build "top-of-mind" awareness of your company or your product. Even if you are a well-established company, you can use creative techniques to make a fresh impression on the marketplace, as over time people might develop a perception that may not be accurate or they may even lose sight of your company.

Start with the item on your company's list of strengths that most sets you apart from the competition. If you know that your salespeople provide the highest level of personal customer service in your market, play it up! Feature one of your salespeople and a happy customer in an ad that will reach as many potential customers as possible. Include a testimonial from that happy customer explaining what it is about your company that keeps him or her coming back to that salesperson.

You can create a fresh perspective by telling your company's story in your advertising, beginning with one key idea that will be used in several initial ad placements. This may become the central, core belief or company brand you desire everyone to remember. Once you feel you have laid the appropriate foundation, then you can add sequential ad placements that build the story you want the market to hear on top of this carefully crafted foundation or branding strategy.

If customer service is the key strength on which your company is focusing, follow up the general testimonial ad with more specific ads that outline your customer service philosophy. Break down the specifics of how working with your company's salespeople is a more pleasant and effective experience than any other in your market. If that involves cutting-edge technology, feature it in the ad. If it involves a one-on-one family approach, make that the focus.

And remember to incorporate the message of your advertising into the other more subtle—and less expensive—marketing tactics that can be employed throughout your company each day: include a complementary message on your company letterhead, instruct your employees to answer the phone with a specific customer service oriented greeting and update your web site to reflect the message being delivered by your advertising efforts.

REFRESHING YOUR IMAGE

A fresh marketing strategy that begins the awareness process anew and draws attention to what has changed and what has stayed the same can be an invaluable tool for salespeople. Creating a situation where name recognition opens the door and an attention-grabbing message rouses curiosity in a new product or service makes sales efforts easier than if each salesperson was paving his or her own way.

This kind of strategy can also be used to correct misperceptions in the market and ensure that

buyers have clear and accurate information. Focusing on top-of-mind awareness and name recognition is important with an emphasis on what is true and what is beneficial. Don't make the mistake of losing your market credibility and past recognition in an image makeover simply by changing too much or failing to hang onto what worked in the past. This is a delicate balance between what's tried and true and what's tired and over-used. Know that changing perceptions in the marketplace is not easy to do and will take a lot of time and effort. One ad will not change your company's image overnight; however, if done properly and given enough time, your company image can successfully complete a facelift.

BUILDING A REPUTATION

After completing the exercise of determining your company's strengths, advertising can be used to help potential customers understand what those strengths are and how they can be used to make day-to-day business decisions more profitable. However, the one thing that advertising will not do is make the sale by itself!

Once awareness of your company and its strengths has been established, the next step is to build on specific features of your company or product, highlighting the benefits that you desire potential buyers to know about. From there you can channel customer desires by supplying all the reasons they should choose to purchase your products. As you add new people, make new products or change business strategies, these skill areas and strengths may change. You can revise your marketing strategies to communicate this to your customers. This cycle is repeated as new ad campaigns are created to introduce new products/services, build new company awareness and refine your brand image.

Keep in mind, however, that you can make or break your company's good reputation by not being able to follow through on the image you have created with true and reliable benefits. Follow-through and promise-keeping are ultimately the keys to the prolonged success of any ad campaign and business strategy.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There are innumerable marketing tactics that can play a key role in reaching potential customers with the message of your company's strengths and its innovative approach to meeting critical builder needs. But even the cleverest of advertising campaigns will be foiled by unhelpful salespeople, bad customer service, slow turnaround, unfilled expectations and broken promises. It all comes down to balance: the right product, at the right time, advertised effectively and followed up with a positive, rewarding buying experience for the customer.

If you've marketed your business in such a way that you create "top-of-mind" awareness with your customers, they will buy from you. If you use your company's strengths to provide the best possible customer service and a high quality product, they will buy from you repeatedly. And, ultimately, if your customers are valued and feel that doing business with your company helps them to be successful, they will recommend your company to their peers. And that is the best marketing money can buy.

Ten (Nearly) Free Marketing/Advertising Tactics

If you think marketing and advertising always require a chunk of change, think again. Here are ten ways to spread the word—without draining your pockets!

1. Word of mouth.
2. Get involved in your industry trade associations or local civic organizations.
3. Send thank you cards to customers with your logo and contact information.
4. Focus on customer service, so that if your price is a little higher, they'll remember your personal care and attention.
5. Stick magnetic signs on all the vehicles you can: family, co-workers, etc.
6. Make sure that your company name, phone number and web site address are on every piece of collateral material that you create.
7. Write articles for industry publications that will include your "byline" (i.e., who you are and the name of the company you own/work for).
8. Make shirts with your logo and/or brand slogan on them for employees/salespeople.
9. Email a quarterly customer newsletter to potential customers.
10. Plan a jobsite lunch: take a couple of pizzas to your customer's jobsite and get to know them.

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