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Kim T. Gordon: Marketing

Rock-Solid Marketing for Trendy Times

Instead of jumping from trend to trend follow these 6 steps for marketing that really works.

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Feeling bombarded by all the theories on the so-called newest, latest and hottest trends in marketing? You're not alone. Jumping from trend to trend in pursuit of the latest idea is the last thing a smart entrepreneur should do in this economic climate. Now's the time to keep a level head and chart a course that's guided by what really works. Take a look at this list of six tried-and-true steps you can take for a successful marketing program in today's marketplace.

1. **Put Finding Prospects First**

How do your best prospects find what they're shopping for? Chances are they begin by using a search tool. Having a strong presence in the online search engines or directories is a must, and you can also purchase links in the resource sections of third-party websites your prospects frequent. Traditional search tools, including the print Yellow Pages, industrial directories and newspapers, have moved online as well and offer increasingly affordable solutions. Magazines with "shopper" sections also represent smart search corridor options for advertisers.

2. **Don't Drop Out Of Sight**

It's always a huge mistake to stop communicating with customers: Out of sight = out of mind. So while the recession may have shrunk your marketing budget, it's essential to find a good mix of tactics you can sustain over the long haul to reach out to clients with sufficient frequency. Develop a database of prospects and customers, then retain and up-sell them through ongoing communication via e-mail and direct mail (check out [Get Your Copy Right](#) for tips on maximizing your messages' impact). And coordinate this effort with acquisition tactics to bring in new prospects.

3. **Separate From the Pack**

Economic hard times have changed the way people shop and what they buy. Today's big motivators include low prices and savings. Free shipping will continue to be a strong incentive through the holidays, and a recent Experian study showed that e-mail solicitations offering free shipping yield higher conversion rates than other marketing messages. Green practices or aligning with a charitable cause can also help positively differentiate your business from its competition. After all, you can't always differentiate based on what you sell; but how you sell, who you are and what you do can make all the difference to prospects.

4. **Invest in Relationships**

In uncertain times, consumers want to buy from companies they trust and believe in. That makes one-to-one customer relationships essential. Wherever possible, increase in-person selling, networking in business and professional groups, and online social networking. Use experiential marketing, such as events that bring you into direct contact with customers in small groups, to foster positive client relationships with your company, products or brand. Create several great letters that can be customized to follow up each interpersonal contact--and send handwritten thank-you notes.

5. **Get People Talking**

Recommendations and positive word-of-mouth are extremely important today. Cautious shoppers want to know they're making safe and smart decisions. A public relations campaign that includes savvy article placements or product reviews can give your sales a lift. For example, a well-placed article that runs on a respected website can quickly be spread friend-to-friend across the web. Another strategy for building word-of-mouth is to create an advisory group of influential clients who are the first to receive your new products, info and special offers. If they like what they see, they'll pass the word along.

6. **Expand Your Website**

Customers are shopping more websites and viewing more pages in less time than ever before, so your site has to immediately grab and hold them with information they want. Highlight special pricing, offers and incentives (such as free shipping) at the top of your homepage. Include background information about your company, its principals, media coverage and charitable giving. And create a space for customers to share their experiences through a message board, or post their stories and testimonials somewhere visible for a website that works hard to help you close sales.

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