

How to avoid a marketing crisis

Simon Rowell reveals the four key rules for effective marketing communications and getting the most out of your advertising agency.

One of the biggest professional fears that marketing managers have, the one that makes them stare hard at the ceiling late at night, is the fear that their marketing communications are missing the mark. This fear often creeps up slowly as sales figures do not meet forecasts and awareness levels push on sideways, and is usually despite the fact that they have spent enormous market research dollars gaining information about their targets.

What has been learned over the years is that there are four key rules that, when objectively applied, will allow for the communications to be given every chance to succeed.

Rule One

In every piece of communication, be it a television ad., a direct marketing campaign or a small brochure, *the brand must be at the centre of the creative*. If you can take your product out of the ad., slot in a competitor product and easily run it, think again. You may just end up spending your budget advertising your category. Ensuring that the brand is tightly entwined into the story will allow your brand, if the creative does its job, to be associated with the messages you want to get across.

This rule is most often broken where organisations and their agencies are trying to be comical or entertaining in

their communication in order to gain cut through in the mind of the market. This is good strategy when done very well, but it is only done well when the issues regarding *what we wish to communicate* and *how we want people to respond* are dealt with first. If everyone can remember the campaign, but no one can remember the brand or what the campaign was trying to communicate, that campaign is a failure. Remember, the bits between the commercials are supposed to be doing most of the entertaining.

Rule Two

Ensure that every agency you have working for you has senior people on the case. Sounds simple enough, but this is the most common complaint about the advertising industry – senior agency managers come to pitches and are never seen again. At a minimum you should be seeing a senior agency manager at least once a month at work-in-progress meetings, and have easy access at all other times. If you cannot have at least this much attention the agency quite simply does not care about your business.

Rule Three

Any agency's role is to provide excellent return on investment, but sometimes this is forgotten. If the success of your performance is based on revenues,

profits, response rates and brand performance, then shouldn't you be basing the success of any agency relationship at least in part on these same measures? One thing is for certain – if you link measurement of an agency's performance to the performance of your organisation, your agency will be very interested in your success as well.

Rule Four

Chart your course moving forward. Often, especially in fast-moving industries, the tendency is to plug gaps and cut corners. This tends to lead to tactically driven and reactionary activity that can often be at odds with the overall objectives of the business.

Strategically planning the way forward, setting and prioritising your marketing objectives and understanding the effects that various proposed activities will have on your brand – these activities allow you to build a communication plan that is driven by objectives (and therefore more easily measured).

Planning allows for all members of the marketing team and the agency team to have a shared understanding regarding the communication elements such as the USP, key benefits, brand vision, personality and attributes, target markets, priorities and resources. Done correctly, this should lead to a clear and focused understanding of what is planned and why, and ensure improved inputs into the communication development process.

These four rules, when applied in conjunction with one another, will allow more effective and efficient communications to be developed and allow marketing managers everywhere a better night's sleep. ●

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