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▶ Tip Sheet

Marketing Communications

Branding

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Translating Marketing Strategy Into PR Execution



Marketing strategies energize public relations campaigns. Unfortunately, marketing-instigated strategy is often lacking, not shared or too fuzzy to help PR pros execute on-strategy campaigns. Sometimes PR has to help marketing create strategy. Without one, PR will remain tactical, random noise without brand benefits or market traction.

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

Public relations is the voice of marketing. Communication strategy boils down to: "What does marketing (or whoever is directing the program) want its customers, prospects or key stakeholders to know that's of value about the organization, program, idea, movement or brand?" Translating strategy into PR practice answers this simply and correctly: "What does the brand stand for?"

Ways of establishing perceptions in the mind of the market (tactical actions) are innumerable as are ways of not creating the desired perceptions. Translation is where marketing and PR gets creative and psychology is applied in the real world.

Effective communications strategy is driven by how the brand idea sits versus competitors. Hint: Everyone can't claim "leadership." However, if you're not first in your market, you can set up a new category

you can be first in. The key to creating effective PR actions is communicating what generates or enhances the valuable perceived difference in the prospect's mind. The singular value you communicate, ideally in a single word you can own (Think BMW and driving), is key to strategic success.

SHAPING PERCEPTIONS

Language, tone and the communications media applied in PR campaigns and other promotional forms shape the perceptions desired by a marketing strategy. Notice I didn't say "change minds." Minds generally resist changing. However, creating perceptions well aligned with the way a defined group of people are already thinking is the correct strategy.

If you don't know how you want to be known, your PR efforts won't gain much traction. "Fear of focus" often occurs among marketing and particularly sales-oriented leaders. Standing for a single thing blows their minds. However, attempting to be a list of things (benefits/values) to people gets you nowhere. People are too bombarded with messages to pay attention to vagueness.

Compare your perceptions of Chevrolet vs. Porsche. Which is well defined? Porsche, in spite of now building SUVs and sedans, retains a strong

place in the mind for the high-performance sports car. What's a Chevy? Is it a truck, a sedan, a sports car, a compact?

Shorthand for these ideas are:

- Your brand is the truth about you well told. Find your story, tell it well (and often).
- Clarity trumps persuasion.
- Make it brain-dead simple.

DISTINCT OR EXTINCT

With marketing and PR team agreement on what the brand stands for and against whom they are competing or what category they want to create and own, they're setting themselves up for success. The path to their goal becomes clear. Tactics that correctly move brand perceptions in the desired direction naturally emerge. People get it. Everyone is heading in the same direction. It doesn't mean everyone says precisely the same words.

What's truly creative is when international brands have to figure out cultural differences, change gears by applying different messages or even adopt an entirely new marketing strategy because what worked in one location won't fit a new environment.

The point is, off-strategy PR dilutes brand perceptions. Without expressing or reinforcing values relevant to strategy, almost anything will fly, and often does. That's prob-

ably why we often see TV spots or other promotions that don't connect and only make us ask, "What was that about?"

To sum up here are my key points:

- Have a competitively differentiated marketing/communications strategy.
- Focus on a specific, well-defined population with aligned values.
- Define the single value your brand or entity wants to be known for.
- Communicate in ways the help drive the desired value perception.

When marketing and public relations work together, something beautiful is bound to happen. PRN

[Editor's Note: For more content about marketing communications and branding, visit PR News' Subscriber Resource Center: prnewsonline.com/subscriber_resources.html.]

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