

It's a Big Multi-Media World Out There: Creating an Integrated Marketing Plan for Your Brand

by Laura Pasternak

Consider these statistics¹: 104 television channels in the average household. Over 12 million Blackberries used in 2008. Nearly 52 million iPods sold in 2007. More than 53% of Americans watch videos online. Almost 20% of Americans listened to podcasts.

Americans are multi-tasking through various media channels. They are listening to iPods while surfing the internet. Many are working on laptops while watching television.

Now, ask yourself: "Have I utilized these mediums in my marketing and branding efforts?" If not, your brand could be lagging. In fact, marketing strategist Kaihan Krippendorff believes companies must employ an integrated approach to marketing or else they will fall behind the competition. According to Krippendorff, approximately 60% of the sophisticated online companies in business employ integrated marketing strategies today.

Melding Tradition and Innovation

With all of the available technology – and the consumer's penchant for using it as evidenced above – a stand-alone brochure or use of a single, traditional medium can no longer build or sustain a brand. Building a brand is a process that doesn't happen overnight. It requires a strong, consistent message that resonates with your constituents and is sustained over time. However, employing an integrated strategy that delivers a consistent message and leverages today's marketing channels can help give your brand a good head start.

Building an integrated marketing plan that employs the right vehicles across multiple channels to communicate your message can support your efforts to create a strong brand. There are many aspects to consider: Who is your audience? What channels do they use for communication? What expectations do they have about how you communicate with them? How can you engage with them most effectively? What message will you deliver? What must you do internally or operationally to support that message? An integrated approach should take into consideration the following elements:

1. **Traditional mediums, such as broadcast media, print media and direct mail.** These tried-and-true methods still have value for reaching certain target audiences and delivering brand messages for particular products and services in certain industries.
2. **Online and digital mediums, including websites, email and both handheld and mobile devices.** The statistics indicate that growing numbers

¹ Statistics from a PRNewswire presentation by Kaihan Krippendorff.

of consumers are turning to online and digital mediums to communicate, obtain information share data, and receive messaging that can influence their buying decisions. These mediums offer direct and sometimes more cost-effective ways to reach and engage specific audiences with your brand message.

3. **Viral and word of mouth marketing tactics.** Word of mouth marketing combines online and offline mediums with the most basic human behavior – talking. Your customer can actually be your greatest advocate. Techniques that help virally spread your message through the voice of your customer should be considered as a part of your marketing mix and brand strategy.
4. **Internal operational processes.** Equally influential in building and sustaining your brand, operational practices are often overlooked when creating an integrated marketing strategy. The human interaction customers have with your company – be it sales or service – can make or break their future purchasing plans. But it's not just client-facing employees that affect the brand. If your back office operations fall short in processing orders or are indifferent about defective products or services, the effect can be devastating to a company's brand.

Podcasts, collective intelligence, peer-to-peer networks like MySpace, blogs and RSS feeds are a few of the latest communication mediums used in marketing. There continue to be new and innovative ways to communicate your message to your target audience. Regardless of the latest innovative technique, no one medium or channel will suffice today. It is clear consumers receive messages, process information, and communicate with one another and with companies in multiple ways across multiple channels. To be an effective marketer in today's marketplace, you must take an integrated approach that combines time-tested marketing mediums with the power of evolving technologies and the desire for human interaction if you are to build a powerful brand.

The Reasons You Won't and the Reasons You Should

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, many executives find reasons not to implement an integrated marketing approach. They see the following as obstacles:

- Lack of resources to implement
- Insufficient barometers to track results
- Too little time available and too much reorganization required
- Inadequate understanding of how to use different marketing tools and what their benefits will be
- Inability to implement this approach into the business strategy, since it will evolve and change over time

Though it's easy to dismiss integrated marketing with the above excuses, in the long run, the benefits far outweigh the challenges: Benefits include:

- Gaining an edge over the competition
- Securing customer loyalty
- Fostering goodwill in the community
- Developing collaboration from your employees, constituents and the community and in turn, their dependence on your organization

With the know-how and a strong plan, integrated marketing can turn a company around, take it to the next level and secure sustainability into the future. JetBlue understands this premise. Due to inclement weather in February 2007, the low-cost airline was forced to cancel nearly one-fourth of its flights at 11 airports, stranding thousands of passengers. JetBlue took these three integrated marketing elements (direct-apologizing in newspapers and magazines; online-doing the same at the website; and operational processes-drafting a customer bill of rights) and quickly set about wooing back customers. It worked. Today, JetBlue is back on track and consistently voted a favorite among travelers.

Integration, Not Separation

No matter how pervasive your marketing efforts, they'll be for naught if your sales and marketing and operational teams are not on the same page. Don't believe me? Just peruse the myriad of online forums consumers can visit to check out products and services or rant about bad experiences with them. As mentioned above, there has been more than one instance where a consumer has sworn off of a business due to a bad experience with the sales team or customer service. The airline industry is inundated with such scenarios.

The same holds true for disparate approaches between your organization and the various agencies or consultants you hire to help drive your brand. If they are not clear about your marketing approach and what your brand represents, the message will get muddled. Similarly, just one "bad apple" in your bunch can wreak havoc on all of your hard work.

Additionally, everyone, from the board of executives and the marketing team to the sales representatives and the IT department, must share the same vision and goals for the company. In order to achieve this, all members of your staff must understand the customer and the brand, and properly execute their role in delivering on the brand.

As mentioned earlier, building a brand isn't just about employing traditional "marketing" functions such as direct mail campaigns and media relations. Instead, it takes a more comprehensive approach that includes customer service scripts, sales tools/training, investor or shareholder relations, community outreach, customer maintenance or service, and industry partnerships. Consequently, it ensures that everyone speaks the same language, sends the same message and delivers the same quality product or service.

By creating an integrated marketing strategy with a team that embraces it and is willing to work together to implement it, you will be able to effectively manage your brand and optimize the promotional and marketing channels used. If your organization traditionally is reluctant to collaborate and share information between departments or outside the company, then your first order of business will be to get everyone in sync before moving forward. Why is it integral to the brand process? Without it, you run the risk of missed opportunities, conflicting messages and confusion in the market about your brand.

Collaboration and Integration at Its Best

There are many companies that have deftly and successfully built a brand through integrated marketing. Here are a few examples:

Abercrombie & Fitch: This apparel company has created a strong brand and a lot of buzz over the years, both good and bad. Abercrombie & Fitch (A & F) employs distinct integrated marketing plans for each of its three entities—A & F, Hollister (the teenager's version of A & F) and Abercrombie (for the elementary school set). The company combines key components to create a readily recognizable brand. Their fresh, all-American models are often recruited/casted from their stores. Along with the models, employees, visual displays, marketing materials and communications exude an ultra-cool vibe to which its demographic longs to aspire. The company's Hollister store accomplishes a similar integrated marketing strategy, but takes on a laid-back surfer persona. A & F leverages its website to tout its hipness and reinforce who the customer is or wants to be, and features models discussing their interests in slick black and white videos. Website visitors can also click on the company's own web-based radio station to hear current music that is played in their stores as well. Even Mad TV parodied the store's distinct brand a few years ago. Every customer contact, store soundtrack, visual display, staff member and store layout contributes to marketing the brand. In the spirit of extending the integrated marketing concept to include operational functions, A & F implemented broadband in its stores; thereby improving online security, in-store transactions, employee training programs and more, all of which enhance the customer's experience.

Disney: The Magic Kingdom's creator, Walt Disney, was not only visionary in planning but marketing as well. Disney has been using integrated marketing for years. They are masters of creating a mental image that will resonate with their target audience. You can download a Miley Cyrus (aka Hannah Montana) video from the website. There are also games at the website as well as portals through which visitors can enter the world of a Disney character like Wall-E to build a robot or explore one of his trucks. Their events and destinations present a myriad of opportunities for visitors to interact with the characters and become part of the action; thereby reinforcing their philosophy that anything is possible and you can create magical memories. Customers can also "experience the world of Disney" through their cell phones merely by texting Disney. Its radio division has expanded beyond the traditional airwaves to include a branded section at Apple's iTunes store as well as a music channel on Verizon/VOD.

Harley Davidson: Back in 1983, Harley Davidson was just barely hanging on by a thread. There was no cash flow, waning employee morale and a more than lackluster consumer market. Today, the company is thriving and ubiquitous. Harley Davidson boasts a strong brand, thanks to a very strong integrated marketing program. Aside from the obvious tools like the bikes, merchandise and stores, Harley Davidson employs multi-media channels and operational tools that have strengthened their brand and the company overall. Utilizing interactive technology, customers can create customized Harley Davidson "skins" for their MP3 players or cell phones. The company also hosts "Try a Bike" events throughout the country, where you can test ride a demo bike. Harley Davidson makes it easy to reach customers and convince them that owning one of their bikes can be a reality. They do so with features such as a payment estimator, a budget calculator and learn-to-ride classes. There is a lot of "involvement/engagement" marketing at Harley Davidson. Bikers can utilize interactive road trip planners and maps. Fans can also share their "creeds" for the road with other fans at the website. Factory tours, a Harley Davidson film at the website, blogs and a museum dedicated to the motorcycles round out their marketing. The organization also participates/volunteers with many groups such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. From the back-end, Harley Davidson took the concept of the factory's self-managing groups and implemented it at the executive level. Doing so ensures that customers will be happy and return again. Moreover, the company will thrive through a stronger brand. Ron Hutchinson, Vice President of Parts, Accessories and Customer Service for Harley Davidson, said " In the final analysis, I'd say the customer service department, where you spend eight hours a day taking phone calls from unhappy customers, is a true test of whether the Business Process works or not. I'm convinced that we wouldn't have the reputation we have today in the marketplace if we didn't have front-line people excited by charismatic, visionary leadership, who can see exactly how their little piece of the organization fits into the long-term strategy and direction of the company."²

These three organizations do a stellar job of triggering multiple senses in their customers and they all repeat the same impression over and over again to leave a lasting image. And while multi-media channels can go a long way in achieving these things, there is no better way to accomplish it than through engaged employees who feel proud to represent the company.

Final Thoughts & Tips

Branding is complex today and requires more forethought and planning than ever before. That's not to say that it should be set in stone. Quite the contrary. It should be malleable and adaptable, with a framework that can respond to today's ever changing environment and provide clarity in the decision-making process. By understanding the

² From "Harley Davidson: Organisation-led Integrated Marketing", Jenkinson, Angus and Sain, Branko.

current landscape, you will enable the employees tasked with managing the brand's various components to ensure that their initiatives "fit" the message and direction.

Customers don't distinguish your brand by the vehicle through which you market to them. Integrated marketing allows you to create a customer experience that is seamless and holistic.

Upfront "thinking" and planning, along with rubric development and benchmarks, will make way for not only a more integrated approach in an organization's marketing and communications efforts, but a successful one too.

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