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SMOKE SIGNALS SENT TO YOUR CUSTOMERS
COULD BURN A HOLE IN YOUR BLANKETS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Advertisement is critical to developing and sustaining sales of products and services in the marketplace. Direct marketing is one of the more successful approaches for the leisure industry. Effective communication is the key to all marketing strategies.

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COMMUNICATION

You have a great idea for a leisure time business opportunity. You are convinced that the public wants your idea and that you can make money. You have done your marketing. You have done your consumer research. You have done your profitability studies. You are pretty sure that you can fill a consumer need and you are either ready to open your business or it has been open for a few months.

Now comes the vital move. You want to tell the world that your ready to fulfill their needs and that you are the best in the business.

At this point in time you also have the opportunity of going broke.

No matter which leisure marketing/sales opportunity you have developed there will come a time when you must communicate with your potential customers--the users of your services or your product.

Communications is the link to your customer base and communications comes in many forms. Editorial media relations, paid advertising, cross-promotions with allied marketers, promotional programs, word of mouth activities, direct response, and direct marketing programs are among today's successful techniques.

Upper most in your planning, must be the fact that today's consumers are deluged with communications messages urging all kinds of deals, offers, products and services.

It is interesting to note that a Pittsburgh radio station, KQV, conducted a survey in regard to the national football league strike. The question posed was "do you think the NFL strike will be settled?" Fifty people said "yes", 256 stated "no" and 1,175 indicated that they "did not care". It is apparent that as high a profile sport as NFL football can quickly suffer from lack of consumer confidence. This is an example not to be taken lightly. This survey proves very strongly the old axiom "out of sight, out of mind".

Your smoke signals (communications) must be clear, easily interpreted, and above all be intrusive across the consumer base from which you wish to draw your business.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

You must recruit cost efficient, flexible and sturdy communications blankets from which your smoke signals can be developed.

The blanket selected for discussion in this article is paid advertising which is probably the most risky, most expensive, most misunderstood and possibly the most productive blanket to develop profitable smoke signals.

Before running out and doing a television commercial, a newspaper advertisement or radio commercial it is important to clearly understand the communications habits of your potential marketplace. Advertising used inappropriately or without knowledge can very quickly bring a new business into bankruptcy. Advertising is expensive and should be subject to expert decision making capabilities.

You should immediately locate an expert with whom to discuss your advertising requirements and needs. In talking to this expert you must clearly define the ideosyncracies, perceptions, habits and misconceptions within the development of your business. Be careful not to restrict your thinking in this area to yourself. You must recruit a third person "reading" in these areas. Unbiased thoughts and reports are mandatory.

A complete understanding of your marketplace will go a long way in the development of cost efficient paid advertising. Hopefully, in this research phase you will be able to detect target or key market groups. A valid group of people can be identified and sold through say a direct mail brochure and response card, thereby providing a cost efficient return on the advertising investment. It could be a serious miscalculation to use a 30 second television commercial during the Duke's of Hazard when, in fact, none of your potential customers watch television.

Most mass media like newspapers, radio, television, bus transit and outdoor signs have key market definitions.

For example, radio offers country and western, middle of the road, and rock programming. Newspapers offer women's sections, and sports pages, while subway/transit penetrates the urban populous. Outdoor signs offer a cost efficient sustaining message capability and Reader's Digest has as base, readers who want lots of information and like reading editorially oriented communications. (Reader's Digest is not a magazine

that you scan.)

Another criteria for serious investigation is the type of message and creative position you wish to take with your business or service. Again if the product or service demands a detailed explanation and your consumers have time to read you can get away with what is termed the "long copy" approach to advertising.

On the other hand, your product or service might be an impulse item and the creative and media experts must work together to present to potential customers messages which are short, snappy, intrusive and be designed to create immediate or impulse purchasing.

SUMMARY

In summary, advertising for leisure businesses is absolutely no different than advertising for any other product or service. There are no unique disciplines or mysteries attached to advertising other than, experience tells us, that the leisure time customer communications tend to meet with lesser acceptance on the part of the average consumer as compared to the advertising of supermarkets, retail stores, financial institutions, automobiles, or chocolate bars.

The most important aspect of advertising is making contact with a communications expert or group of experts and establishing a trustful working/business relationship. Advertising practitioners, are no different than lawyers, dentists, or doctors. Your business' use of advertising is no different than you attempting to discuss and recommend approaches to your doctor while he or she is performing your triple heart by-pass. Advertising is essential to all operations for success, especially those elements associated with large volume.

The second critical discipline you should address yourself to is your complete understanding of your customer. Market research is vital in the development and execution of successful communications programs to your potential customers. Market research can also establish target markets which are much more economical to pursue than going the broad, undefined shot gun approach.

If after reading this article you came away with these two major points, you will go a long way toward creating profitable smoke signals which will reach your customer base without burning what is known to be a very expensive blanket.