

TOP 10 Marketing Tips for 2009

1. Be the brightest star in cyberspace

Canadians spent \$12.8 billion online in 2007 (Statistics Canada). More astounding is that a whopping 19 million of the country's 32 million people were online in 2007. If your website still says "copyright 2007" in the footer, it may be time for a redesign.

Business and final consumers are using the internet to research and buy products and check out your competition. Where a company's office building or storefront used to be a common first impression, now it is often a website, so don't be afraid to invest in this increasingly important first-impression maker. If your competition has a more attractive, more comprehensive or higher-ranking site, price may not matter.

2. Re-evaluate your game plan

Re-evaluate your goods and services offerings, your target markets, your brand, your mission statement and your entire marketing strategy. Economic, social, technological, environmental and demographic factors change continually, and businesses who are still marketing to the same population or business segments they did 10 years ago may not make it to the playoffs this year.

Think for example of some of the top brand wars in the world. Coca Cola and Pepsi, Nike and adidas, and Apple and Microsoft are consistently investing in new product development. Commercials got a lot more interesting in recent years since Visa, MasterCard and American Express embarked on their television ad war.

Make it your company's new year's resolution – re-evaluate your corporate and marketing strategies.

3. Get back on track with feedback

How can you improve your offerings? Well, as the old adage goes, "the customer is always right," and guess what – they know best.

For all types of consumers, customer feedback can help pinpoint strengths and weaknesses.

If your clients are businesses, cater an in-house luncheon for up to 10 clients, and voila, you have an inexpensive focus group.

Other means to get feedback include customer satisfaction surveys, comment cards or questionnaires, focus groups, the analysis of past sales data, and asking front-line staff to collect informal feedback.

4. Strengthen your e-social media marketing IQ:

Ever heard of Social Media Marketing or Social Media Optimization? How about Social Bookmarking? The terms relate to using social networking sites as a way to get users to generate interest in a brand. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, YouTube and others are making a killing from traditional advertisers – there's no doubt. But reaching many many users on these sites with your message doesn't have to cost a dime.

Some might go as far to say that social media marketing helped decide a U.S. presidency. Barack Obama's YouTube "Yes We Can" video has attracted more than 15 million viewers since it was uploaded. Obama's politician page on Facebook currently has more than 3.5 million supporters, while John McCain's only lists 580,000.

5. Serve up a tasteful stunt:

When Taco Bell announced its purchase of the Liberty Bell in 1996, its revenues increased by \$500,000 the same day, which just happened to be April Fool's Day. It is estimated the stunt generated the equivalent of \$25 million in free media attention according to PainePR, the public relations firm behind the stunt.

Granted, this is an extreme example. But if your company puts a brainstorming session together to come up with a marketing stunt that is safe, relevant and that will make people take notice, revenues could take a giant leap off your income statement just as in the Taco Bell example.

For smaller budgets, consider LonelyGirl15. The producers of the fictional series let its YouTube audience believe it was a real video blogger. LonelyGirl15 turned into a YouTube phenomenon that resulted in a \$5-million investment from venture capitalists in 2008, according to BusinessWeek.

6. Go the green mile:

Your clients and employees alike are sporting canvas bags for shopping, have recycling boxes at the end of their driveways, and 940,000 Canadians voted green in the 2008 federal election according to the Green Party of Canada.

Businesses who adopt environmentally-sound processes are not just greening their corporate conscience. They're showing a green front for their many customers who currently care about the environment as well as for those who will follow suit.

Not to mention that adopting green practices ahead of your competitors will help to differentiate your company from others. An eco-friendly policy could be the lone deciding factor between two similar companies.

7. Work for your workforce

Marketing to employees is gaining in importance in two specific departments – human resources and marketing. That’s why in many companies, these two departments are teaming up to develop HR marketing strategies.

First – former, current and potential staff are valuable word-of-mouth assets to your company. The way they speak about your company can affect sales and employee turnover. Marketing to employees will ensure that they are delivering the right message.

Second – as the average age continues to increase and with no baby boom encore in sight, finding and keeping talent will continue as a significant human resources challenge.

8. Put your money where your metrics are

Every marketing plan should include means to measure its effectiveness. If obstacles are impeding projected sales at any point during the product’s life, metrics will point out these inconsistencies. Isn’t it better to be alerted to unpredictable variations so that any problems can be uncovered and quashed, than to assume that a marketing plan sans metrics will suffice? Hindsight is 20/20 after all.

If your company already has metrics established, think outside the box and determine what isn’t being measured yet that would be useful. SROI, for example, or social return on investment quantifies a company’s value creation for society.

9. Run in more circles

For business-to-business companies, networking is a relatively easy face-to-face marketing tactic. It is a surefire way to get in front of your target market under the pretences of mutually sharing ideas. Building and nurturing relationships is a goal of the many networking functions available in whatever community you do business in, but turning those relationships into revenues is equally as important.

If your company is swimming in the same social pools as always, new opportunities may not be as abounding as they once were.

Evaluate whether attendance at each recurring networking event still has benefits; add new networking opportunities to the corporate calendar; and finally, breathe new life into old business networks by sending in your company’s up-and-comers.

10. Win by waiting on the sidelines

First place with a client doesn't mean that your company is the loser if you're in second place. It just means you're waiting in the wings for your competitor to falter.

Just because a big client has chosen your competitor as first string, this is not an indication that you should abort the mission and cease all contact. On the contrary – continue to build the relationship and make sure your company is top of mind for future business.

Customers can be fickle. When they're ready to move onto another provider, you've already positioned your company as next in line.