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Be Your Own AD AGENCY

Showrooms of all sizes are reimagining how they can compete in a marketplace that is in a constant state of flux. BY MARK OKUN

The need to level the playing field begins with the alignment of marketing, advertising, and sales. The marketing battle showrooms face is similar to that of the well-known story of David & Goliath. Independent showrooms need not fall victim to well-funded challengers with many employees. The way to win is to focus on your strengths instead of your weaknesses in comparison to your competitors' size, procedures, and lengthy processes.

I have stated previously that mass marketing is on life support – if it still has any breath left at all – and a one-size-fits-all advertising strategy will not provide the differentiation you need to stand out in your trading area, never mind on the internet. Today's customers will pass over the once-reliable product ads that scream "Buy me!" However, there are some basic advertising disciplines you must keep in mind.

BEGIN WITH FIVE PS

In his 1960 textbook "Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach," E. Jerome McCarthy defined the 4 Ps marketing mix and the foundational actions that have since been used by companies for decades. I will introduce one more "P" that will help you adapt it to the digital formats of today.

McCarthy's 4 Ps are Product, Pricing, Placement, and Promotion. In the past, you only needed to understand and apply these four characteristics in your advertising to drive clients to your business and experience sales success.

I am adding a fifth "P" – Persona – which I feel is the attribute that impacts all others. I want to introduce this "P" with the adage, "You can't be all things to all people." In the digital age, this statement has never rung more true.

With all of the challenges of being a showroom these days, aiming for the clients who will be best

served by you is the first goal. Being a generalist in the product categories we offer has put our businesses in competition with big box stores and their corresponding digital dealers. These competitors are focused on trading boxes for dollars, with reduced levels of knowledgeable service.

WHAT IS A BUYER PERSONA?

When speaking of buyer personas, we must understand that these are crystal clear descriptions of fictional characters that generally represent the customers and clients we wish to appeal and sell to.

Creating personas is an investment in time that will provide marketing and sales benefits.

When building a buyer persona, include the standard demographic details we are familiar with, such as income level, specific location, and age. Then add in specific details that represent their behaviors, motivations, and pain points. Most showrooms have three to five main personas to develop, however, I'll name three broad-based types here: Retail client, Trade client, and Design client.

Each one of these client types will have similar and defining characteristics that must be included in your marketing and sales efforts. Using the Design client as an example, we first must give her a name – say, Denise Design, but her friends call her DD. When developing DD's persona, you can use the bullet point method, but I find writing it out gives more life/depth to each fictional character. For example, "DD is 30 to 50 years old, has an extroverted personality, and is a tireless networker. Her work with clients is her art, but she is all business when it comes to purchasing products and her selection of service providers. Her creativity – blended with being a skilled problem-solver – is an attribute that her clients desire. DD is accurate and detailed, focusing on the client's requests and maintaining her reputation in the industry. DD's strengths are providing pleasing designs combined with accuracy, organization, and conviction." When it comes to DD's demographics: "She is married, has two college-age children, maintains offices in two states, and has a staff of four. Her projects range in budget from \$10,000 kitchens to hundreds of thousands of dollars for entire homes." Keeping the details broad allows you to adjust your presentation and marketing for the specific client in front of you.

Having an understanding of the various buyer personas who visit your showroom can impact their

purchasing and merchandising decisions as well as the way we market and sell to them.

BUILD YOUR BRAND AT DIGITAL SPEED

Building your brand is more than having a cool logo and a penchant for posting images online. Branding associates your business with an identity that will attract the clients you want.

When building a brand, the questions that must be answered are similar to those we would ask of a person. What is the driving force behind your business? What is the personality of your business? What value does your business represent to the community? How is your business presented to the public?

The result of a well-thought-out brand strategy comes from associating your showroom with the answers you provide to the above questions; the desired outcome is a long-term relationship with your community and customers.

Your results will be miserable if you try to reproduce what your competitors – or even other brands – are saying or doing. Instead, celebrate the options and creativity that being an independent store has to offer.

There are some who think a branding strategy means slapping a sticker on a catalog or printing their name on a bag. While bags and stickers have their place in brand reinforcement, the power and speed are all digital.

Few showrooms feel that they can dedicate the resources needed to be successful at digital advertising – but with all this discussion of strategy, I will lay out a basic digital marketing procedure for showrooms to adapt. There are parts of digital marketing that can be used based on budget, and there are volumes dedicated to them. With limited article space, I have focused on what you can do at very little or no additional cost; it's mostly an investment in time.

BLOG, BLOG, WHO HAS A BLOG?

Nearly all successful showrooms have websites; however, a site is more than a landing page and a catalog. It is the epicenter for all you do digitally, and the place where your digital assets reside – from the compelling About Us page and galleries of images and videos to your Blog.

Put aside your feelings about blogging for a moment and understand that if you want to be known as an expert in your field to the community you

“For small business owners, the most challenging aspect of digital marketing is just getting the work done.”

—Infusionsoft by Keap

“Blogging allows your audience to discover your showroom from the comfort of their digital device, wherever they are.”



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serve, having a consistently posted blog specific to your marketplace, services, and product categories will make you the authority in your niche.

Many showrooms like and share posts from magazines, vendors, and clients, but while this supports the “like and share to show you care” tactic, it should be a small part of your efforts. It does little to claim your stake in the market as the expert.

Another misstep I see being made is showrooms, reps, and manufacturers using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others as the storerooms for their content instead keeping that content on their own websites and then distributing it through the variety of social media platforms. The goal of good content is to drive eyes to your website based on the information.

Please know that the “Sale!” message does not have the same call-to-action effect that it has had in the past. Transactional marketing efforts no longer bring in the foot traffic showrooms need to survive or the revenue that they want. The new end game is to build relationships that are outwardly directed at the customer.

Blogging allows your audience to discover your showroom from the comfort of their digital device, wherever they are. This builds trust because you are the source of the information they are looking for. Consumers want to be informed, and blogging on a consistent basis does that.

WHAT TO BLOG

It’s easy to say you need a blog and leave it at

that, but that provides no value. Every client has unspoken questions we need to answer, and these questions become your writing prompts. Questions such as:

→ **Why should I give you my business?**

The answer can be based on your value proposition, the service level you provide, or even that the showroom is a cornerstone of the community for generations.

→ **What makes you different?**

The answer to this question can influence the client’s decision to buy brick rather than to click. This is your unique value-add to the sale and the customer.

→ **How are problems handled?**

Provide examples of problems that can occur and how the showroom handles them. Extend this thinking beyond explaining how issues are dealt with and tell a story about a real situation where the showroom came to the aid of the client in a way that went beyond expectations.

As the silos of sales and marketing meld, I feel these ideas cover some of the tools available to help showrooms with their marketing. At the least, it’s a comfortable place to start to take control and become your own ad agency.

As always, *Happy Selling!* ❖



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