

Think Your Marketing Works? It May, If You Can You Spell C-R-E-A-T-I-V-I-T-Y.

Marketing and advertising – oh, how the industry has changed, and continues to change! It’s mysterious to those not involved with it on a daily basis, and perplexing and frustrating to those who live and breathe it daily.

How do you know what to do, what to say, how to say it and where you should say it? Is what you’re doing working? How the hell do you know if your marketing works?

Well for starters . . . People may be talking about you in a good sense (positive buzz); maybe they’re referring to something you’ve published or had a good experience when dealing with your company; maybe they remember seeing something that referenced you in some way. Hopefully, there will be several different, positive signals.

Let me be clear on one point: There is no one thing you can do that will guarantee results. Results can best be gauged and marketing success can best be measured through a mix of efforts. It also depends on what kind of results you’re after.

Let me be clear on another point: You can’t talk about marketing without mentioning that “10-letter, often understood” word - creativity. Creativity plays a vital role in marketing and advertising. Creativity is a state of mind. And when the mind is having fun, creativity is boundless. Creativity occurs when people perceive there are no limits.

What does creativity mean to you? It can mean different things to different people.

Creativity can be defined as the ability to see, feel, touch, think and imagine what one has not seen, felt, touched, thought or imagined before; creativity is solving a marketing problem in order to stimulate demand. My favorite definition: Creativity is simply “intelligence having fun.”

In gauging whether or not your marketing is working, the power of ideas can’t be underestimated. Creativity is the spark that ignites what you say and how you say it.

No longer is the creative department at an agency or in-house at a corporation the sole purveyors of the “creative idea.” If you still think that, then shame on you.

It doesn’t matter whether you’re an artist, wordsmith, media planner, financial planner, sales guru, receptionist, real estate mogul or engineer. Each one of us represents a different perspective, a different creative slant. We are all creative in one form or another.

It shouldn’t matter where ideas come from. Content is king and even though how it’s conveyed is important, the idea should be media and discipline neutral. Otherwise, you limit

yourself. It's what we do with the idea that matters. Clients only care about how we're going to make it work and be relevant.

So, how do you get into the creative spirit or feel like you're creative?

Ye Olde Creativity Survival Kit to the rescue. Get any sort of container (old, cleaned out paint can is great) in which you place whatever makes you FEEL creative and THINK creatively. A music CD, crayon, gum, Post-it Notes (for that next, great idea as well as a neat brainstorming technique) are all wonderful examples.

Okay, once we have an idea or two, what do we do?

Figure out what needs to be said and how that might be told. Sales folks and account people play integral roles in soliciting that type of information from the client. As ideas are developed, make sure their essence is refined.

In other words, make sure your ideas are clear and that you can explain their basic value in about 20 seconds. This makes it easier for the idea to gain acceptance.

We must deliver what clients need most: *creative solutions to business problems*. We need to be creative business thinkers as well as story-tellers. We should think of ourselves as the designated “devil’s advocate,” the trusted resource with a different perspective.

Now that we're “feeling creative,” have some ideas and even have a pretty good sense of how to convey them, here are some areas you might consider giving attention to enhance your marketing efforts so that your marketing works the way you intend.

1. Web site

Think of this as your global business card and brochure. This is what the world, not to mention the search engines, sees about your company. A Web site can be a reputation and credibility killer if not executed correctly and creatively. Your site needn't cost a ton of money but it must be user friendly, easily navigable and provide appropriate and relevant information. Your customers and visitors not only expect this, they demand it.

I suggest you hire a professional to design and write your site. If you have an IT department, don't let them design it. Knowing what you want to convey on the site and actually doing so are two different things.

Suggestion: Make sure your Home Page tells what you do in very simple terms and it's said near the top center and at the very bottom of each page. This is the last thing that search engines read so this will reinforce what you're about. Repeating this in a handful of words within your page title helps you with the likes of Google and Yahoo. The Page Title is the area at the very top of your browser window.

2. Identity/reputation

Creativity is needed to distinguish oneself. Creativity brings out your USP, unique selling proposition and helps you promote that in a variety of ways. The USP is what sets you apart.

For what is your company known? When people think of your company, what do they think or say? Do you have a tag line expressing the essence of what you do? How one brands one's company should only enhance and build upon one's identity and reputation.

It's not unheard of to have more than one USP, each aimed at a different market segment or type of customer. I basically have two: 1.) One covering business as a whole: “Developing solutions thru creativity” and 2.) One geared toward marketing folks at small to mid-size companies: “We make your marketing make sense.”

3. Speak out

Speaking engagements and/or any type oral presentation does wonders for your company's publicity and awareness when you address various organizations on a topic about which you are quite knowledgeable. Publicize these events on your Web site as well as in the press releases you send. Get involved in a speakers' bureau if you can, like the one we have in the Tenth District of AAF. I view these opportunities as a way to give back to the community, to share, to give of oneself.

4. Write articles/written presentation

Awaken the writer within you and submit articles expressing and delivering value and something of substance. Remember, you should be an expert in your field. Act like it and submit something to the newspaper, a business journal and relevant trade journals. Maybe it's a “Tip of the Week” column in the local community paper. Again, this serves to broaden the publicity for your company and reinforce the firm's and your credibility. Refer to this [HBJ article](#) (PDF) as example or view on the [Web](#).

5. Listen, listen, listen!

Be aware of your surroundings, learn what your clients and customers want and discover what they need. How do you do that? Start by asking probing questions beyond what is normally asked. Nothing is out of bounds or closed to discussion until someone says it is. And even then, ask why!

In essence, you want to “provoke conversation.” Think of it as a new mindset, of being like an investigative reporter. You constantly refine the questions, especially when you use a few of the last words spoken in the previous answer. The more you get the client to converse, the better information you receive. Eventually, you'll discover new and

different points of view and, probably, ideas. In doing so, you'll be bringing added value to the table.

Some final thoughts . . .

1. Always think of yourself as creative . . . because you are! If in doubt, think of this: If you have the ability to challenge your own imagination and stimulate thoughts to lead you to a new level of solution, you'll be realizing your own sense of creativity.
2. Creativity needs to become more synonymous with “FUN!” Ideas foster creativity and vice versa. Don't ever be afraid to ask, “ Why, Why not or What if . . .?”.
3. Special notes to management:
You don't manage creativity; you manage FOR creativity. Provide an environment that is open and receptive to new ideas; not one that is stifling and closed.
And,
If you keep filling your week with scheduled meetings and tasks, you'll snuff out the creative sparks before they have a chance to fly. When you spend more time going to meetings than actually getting work done, there's a problem.
4. If your company wants to generate interest, it needs to be interesting. Regardless, though, of what is done or how it's done, remember: Trying to satisfy everybody never got anybody anywhere.
5. Make sure your marketing conveys your message and image as straightforward and innovative as possible. Be consistent with your messages. Your Web site, for example, should reinforce what your brochure and advertisements say.
6. Be careful, though. Your marketing message will be diluted and possibly even confusing if the creative is too cute, too complex or just plain dumb when you try to convey your message. Don't let the execution bury the idea.
7. **Take time to think.** We get so rushed that we often times forget this part. Then think how you'll apply what you're thinking about. There's always more than one way to do something. That's where creativity comes in.

Everyone in this room knows a lot of people. Use that to your advantage. Contrary to what we'd like to believe, we don't know everything. But, we don't have to. That's why we all know people who know something we don't. That's being resourceful while being a resource for others.

8. A clear, concise, easily understood and consistent message about what you do and how you do it – with just the right amount of creativity in the mix – will go a long way towards having a marketing campaign that works, and works well.

Before wrapping up, there’s a thinking exercise I want to tell you about. It’s idea generation and centers around generating a certain number of ideas in a limited amount of time (say 50 ideas in 5 minutes). The goal is to supply possible answers to a specific question on the way to solving a problem.

I call it “Thinking at Warp Speed.” It’s a great way to get your staff more involved and discover potential solutions to help your clients and your own company. Here’s basically what you do:

Divide into teams of about 4-5 and have a stack of post it notes for the group. Each person writes his or her idea on a post it note. That idea is a possible solution to the question you’re trying to answer, which may or may not pertain to your marketing agenda. No more than a word or two per note. Because this is a timed exercise, you’re thinking as quickly as you can.

Don’t over analyze or discuss. You’re just generating ideas and as many of them as you can in a small amount of time. Then when time is up, you collect and group the notes to flush out any possible duplicates. What you are left with is a bunch of potential ideas that need to be explored. How you explore them is another exercise.

So, in closing --

In a speech to the American Creativity Association, the Director of Innovation for Pixar, world famous animation studio, said this about failure:

Don’t just build failure into the system, honor failure. Don’t be afraid to acknowledge error or failure; not in a ridiculing way but in a constructive and supportive way. I don’t think we do this enough.

In doing so, Pixar has adopted what they call a “suckless mentality” – “That really sucks! But, if you tried this, it might suck less.”

Will there be mistakes made? Sure. According to Scott Adams in The Dilbert Principle, “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.”

Here’s to your limitless creativity. May the ideas keep coming forth!

Thank you very much!
[Joe Fournet](#) and [Ideas & MORE](#)