

Creativity’s Role in Small Business Marketing

Creativity plays a vital role in small business marketing. This presentation will share some thoughts on what creativity is or what we believe it to be. Also highlighted are some areas one might consider to improve or enhance one’s marketing.

What does creativity mean to you?

Let me offer some thoughts. 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; creativity is the ability to see, feel, touch, think and imagine what one has not seen, felt, touched, thought or imagined before; creativity is solving a communications or marketing problem in order to stimulate demand.

My favorite definition is “intelligence having fun.” 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. This morning we’re talking about the power of ideas, and creativity is the spark; the spark that can ignite your small business marketing.

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.

Now that we’re “feeling creative,” here’s a Top 10 list, in no special order, of what you might consider doing or revising to enhance your small business marketing.

- **Brochure**

How many of you have a company brochure? How many of you are satisfied with it? While some may think the Web has supplanted the role of the brochure, there are still times when it makes sense to hand out something about your company (trade show) or to include in a mailing with your business card and, say, a Thank You note. A brochure can be handy when meeting a prospective customer who may want to take something for reference. Just make sure it’s professionally done.

Proper use of color, white space, paper stock, interesting graphics, informational and interesting – all contribute to making a positive first impression about you and your company. Just remember: Don’t try and say everything about your company in the brochure. Think of this as Reader’s Digest, NOT War and Peace!

- **Business Cards**

The universal mini-billboard. You don’t need to cram every conceivable bit of information onto this little card. Don’t be afraid to use graphics or photography. This little device speaks volumes about you. What’s unique or special about your company? Is it illustrated on your business card?

When you practice the “toss down maneuver” (when you actually toss the card onto an area with other cards), does it stand out among the other cards on the table? Also, a little suggestion: Don’t forget to leave at least half the back side of the card blank so the recipient can make a note or two. And, if you have a photo on front side and it’s glossy or laminated to enhance the colors, leave a matte (dull) finish on back so you can write on it.

- **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. The Web is no longer a novelty. A Web site is serious business and 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.

Again, 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.

- **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? You’ve heard of branding? That’s what we’re talking about here.

- **Logo-ed shirt (nice) and/or Other Specialty Items**

Not everyone needs one but almost every company seems to have some sort of nice looking shirt with their logo professionally applied. Talk with the experts you know in specialty advertising/promotional products.

Remember, you don’t want to be like everyone else. There is a reason why I have several shirts in solid, different colors. They tie in with the crayons used in my marketing materials. I have a box for everyone here.

- **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 here at the chamber. I view these opportunities as a way to give back to the community, to share, to give of oneself.

- **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 (HBJ) and relevant trade journals. Maybe it’s a “realtor 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.

- **Be an expert at one thing and very good at others**

What one area are your REALLY good at? Can you truly be referred to as an expert in this area? You may not realize it, but others may perceive you as such. Whatever it is, flaunt it. You can do so by some of the previously mentioned items on this list. There are also several other areas in which one can say one is very good but, maybe, short of “expert” status. Use these to your advantage. In doing so, one becomes more of a resource than one might think.

- **Be resourceful and a resource for others**

Take time to think. 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. The Chamber is a perfect environment for this.

- **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. Then, ask why!

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 your customer.

And, finally, let me leave you with this . . .

Always think of yourself as creative . . . because you are!

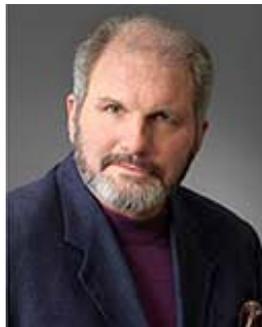
Remember, creativity is not confined to graphic design or writing or interior design or architecture or some other so-called creative endeavor. As long as you know how to think and develop your thoughts to lead you to a new level of solution, you’ll be developing your own sense of creativity.

Creativity needs to become more synonymous with “FUN!” Ideas foster creativity and vice versa. Don’t ever underestimate the power of the mind or your imagination. Don’t ever be afraid to ask, “ Why, Why not or What if . . .?”.

If you want to generate interest, you need to be interesting. Regardless, though, of what you do or how you do it, remember: Trying to satisfy everybody never got anybody anywhere. Make sure your marketing conveys your message and image as straightforward and innovative as possible.

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.” May you all become exceptional artists!!

Feel free to submit comments and questions to the address below.



Thank You!