



By G.A. "Andy" Marken

About the Author

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Corporate management and marketers constantly have asked themselves and their communications people how much does advertising matter? With the slower economy and tight budgets the question has been raised even more frequently.

Ad budgets become an irresistible target for budget-slashers.

When companies look even more closely at their marketing budgets they often feel that there are shows they must attend because they are pivotal to the industry. However, since they are participating in the show, preshow advertising appears to be a needless added expense. The common reason is, "We already are going to be at the show so we will get the time in front of our customers we need without the added expense."

An August cover story in BusinessWeek points out that people who starve their brands now will be paying for it in the future. At the same time both allbusiness.com and about.com, two business information sites, point out that going to a trade show without preshow promotion is a waste of time ... and money.

Advertising in Bad Times

Kevin Keller of Dartmouth University notes that in an era of wide customer choices with roughly comparable products and services, people rely less on a list of features and more on a relationship that is built and maintained by the company's consistency.

While the research isn't conclusive, Keller—and others who study the subject—see indications that the best way to gain marketshare is to sustain advertising spending during a downturn as rivals cut back. In fact, Donald Uzzi of Electronic Data Systems (EDS) says, "Smart companies look at these environments when other people go darker to advance their position."

Marketeers outside traditional consumer goods have shown less willingness to support their brands. As a result, Keller and other industry watchers say they risk losing their pricing power and, even more important, their connection with their customers. Skittish customers need reassurance that the investments they

# Tradeshow Advertising for Exhibitors

## Why It Matters More Now Than Ever for Exhibitors to Communicate with Attendees

have made will pay off and that the supplier will be there to support them. For example, IBM firmly indicated that it would absolutely stay on course. This long-term thinking may be one reason why the firm only lost 1 percent of brand value in 2001 while other high-tech firms suffered much larger declines.

Keller says that firms that tamper with their core commitment to their brands are at grave risk. Those that stay on a steady advertising course usually find their good names are worth a lot more when the tough times end.

Advertising Around Shows

Michael Zane, president of Kryptonite, Inc., producers of U-shaped bicycle locks, says that even though the firm's name almost is a household word, the company still maintains strong visibility around the major trade shows. "It is vital that we reinforce our commitment to our products to our channel partners," he noted. He also emphasized that in every market there is a constant turn of key personnel and prospective customers. Advertising prior to the show helps attract these prospective channel partners specifically to his booth.

Post-show promotion equally is important because it provides reinforcement to people who visited the booth as to the new products and ideas they saw at the show. It also captures people who missed the unveilings at the booth as well as those who did not or could not travel to the show.

Web Evolution

While the failure of hundreds of dot-coms has tarnished the image of Web advertising, it still provides the best combination of broad and selective reach as well as measurable results when used properly.

Scott Bedbury, CEO of BrandStream, notes that despite the fact that the

Internet has in many degrees leveled the playing field for B2B companies, price is not everything. "Manufacturers also must recognize that they no longer can make one product and ship it to anything that walks, on or off the Web, and then turn their back on what happens next," he commented. "The value proposition increasingly is becoming important. Firms that create undifferentiated products eventually go out of business without the real or perceived value and enhanced customer relationship."

Regis McKenna, chairman of The McKenna Group, emphasized that the Internet has changed the course of many businesses but not advertising and branding thinking. "It is not a broadcast medium like television," he said. "It is much more of a service medium where you have people interact and exchange information with you. Because of this, Web advertising becomes increasingly important. Trying it once and not producing results only means that you were doing it wrong. It takes the

experience of failure and time to learn and evolve to produce success."

Banner ads that sit like a valance atop the screen still are the most popular form of Internet advertising, although sometimes they may not be very effective. AdRelevance suggests that marketers try other ad shapes and technologies such as the button or the form of the ad which includes text boxes or drop-down menus. Under and overlay web ads also are proving to be increasingly effective. The Internet and Web are in the formative and evolutionary stages. Creativity will get more attention than a fleeting mix of pixels. The key is to use the strengths and benefits of the Web to your best advantage.

Keep in mind that Web advertising can offer scalability, online community demographics, targeted messages, deep content and detailed tracking and measurement data. It cost-effectively provides companies with the ability to extend the transaction. Most important is the fact that new online advertising technologies are emerging that will produce a new generation of ads that use animation, video and even built-in e-commerce capabilities.

These techniques can move prospects more easily to your company to learn more about you, your products and services and your unique selling propositions.

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