



THE HUNT FOR ADVERTISING ANSWERS

By Tim Miles

Asking the right questions to meet your business goals

Recently, I was in Sioux Falls, S.D., giving a seminar to a large crowd of business owners. As always, I invited them to e-mail me some questions in advance so I could have a few days to think about the questions and answer more thoughtfully.

One question has stuck in my craw: “I own a _____ company. What are the five best ways to advertise for my type of business?”

I leave the type of business blank because it does not really matter. I hope you can see, though, that the question is completely and dangerously oversimplified.

I don’t know anything about the business. I don’t know anything about the competition, and I don’t know the market. The real question is: “Why aren’t more people doing business with my company?” Before I could confidently answer, I would need more information.

Three Dials of Marketing

If you feel that some or all of your marketing budget is being wasted, take a close look at marketing’s three dials—the only three factors you have control over. (We are not talking about operations, overhead or cost of goods. We are talking strictly about marketing.)

Share of voice. If your problem is that people don’t know about you, dial up your share of voice. What percentage of all advertising done in your business category in your market is actually yours? How much do you spend in comparison with your competition?

Relentlessly reach as many people as you can afford to reach with sufficient repetition so that people think of you when a need for your product or service arises.

Personal experience factor. If your problem is that people do know about you, then your problem is not with your advertising. Remember, advertising only accelerates the inevitable: A good advertising campaign will put a

bad company out of business faster.

Oftentimes, the best thing a struggling company can do with its ad budget is to put it instead into sales training and soap. You need to dial up your personal experience factor: How well do you delight and dazzle your customers compared with your competitors? Are your employees rock stars? Is your parking lot spotless? Do you use social media as a tool to listen to, reward and engage your customers? Have you raised the anticipated price of doing business with you by building value into everything that comes into contact with your customers?

Impact quotient. If your problem is that people think they know about you, but they really don’t, dial up your impact quotient. How memorable, persuasive and “sticky” are your ads compared with those of your competitors? Notice that I did not ask how creative, funny and professional your ads were. We are not trying to win awards. We are trying to grow your business.

Hire a killer strategist and ad writer to help you find and address the needs of consumers in your market. Answer questions that the consumers are asking.

Three Questions of Advertising

To find out what questions they are asking, let’s look at one more Sioux Falls question. It is the strangest question that has been asked of me in my nearly 20 years of giving seminars: “How does an elephant hunter advertise? I need five projects a year to make a good year.”

This is South Dakota mind you—not Zimbabwe. (I assume the person who posed the question was being metaphorical, but I was not going to let that ruin my fun. I answered the question literally.)

An elephant hunter who is trying to bag five projects advertises the same way a shoe store, urgent care clinic or veterinary practice advertises. A successful elephant hunter advertises well, because, in the words of my partner, Roy H.

Williams, advertising badly usually does not work out too well.

Solid marketing principles work. Fundamentals are timeless. Tricks and gimmicks may change and vary, but the old standbys work year after year in business category after business category.

That is, they work if you are good at what you do, you like talking about what you do and you delight your customers—whether you have five or five million of them.

Regardless of your business, ask yourself three questions.

Common denominator. What is the common denominator of all the people you are trying to attract? In this case, it is big game hunters or, more generally, thrill-seeking people with cash who are not afraid of unpopular opinions.

Customer desires. What attracted them to that common denominator? This is one of the key points to start honing in your message. Ask the elephant hunters you know this question. Record their answers. Dig for “diamonds”—little moments that click in your head that paint vivid pictures of customers’ dreams, desires and aspirations. This fertile field of attraction will help you grow your advertising campaign.

Scratching the itch. What is their unscratched itch? What is their great frustration? Here, my hunter friend, is the other part of your solution. What are their answers to this question? What deeply felt need do you satisfy? What itch do you scratch? And how do you scratch it differently than the other elephant hunters?

Compete to be unique. Scratch the itch. Understand the why. And ask interesting questions. *wqp*

Tim Miles is founder of the Imagination Advisory Group. Miles can be reached at tim@ouriag.com or 573.234.6282.

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