

Top Tips for Marketers to beat the downturn

Author: Geraint Holliman, Managing Director

OPEN SKY
Creative Integrated Communications

Whilst we in the 'marketing community' are living in unprecedented times there is no reason why the basic precepts of good marketing practice should be shoved to one side in favour of panic-driven expediency. Indeed, now is the time to remember what makes marketing work effectively AND efficiently and to stick to the basics.

So, to encourage all marketing professionals to remain confident and upbeat during these difficult months here are Open Sky's top marketing tips for beating the economic downturn.



Open Sky Ltd

Aspect House, Herriard Business Park, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG25 2PN, UNITED KINGDOM

T +44 (0) 1256 385600 F +44 (0) 1256 385666 W www.open-sky.co.uk



OPEN SKY
Creative Integrated Communications

Customers, customers, customers, customers, customers, customers

We can't say it enough. Prospects aren't going to make you successful next year; CUSTOMERS will do. Existing customers are 5 to 7 times more profitable to deal with than new customers. Make sure you know EXACTLY who your best customers are (or could be) and concentrate on them. Ensure your brand remains relevant and authentic. Think of customers as ASSETS and INVEST in those assets with an expectation of RETURN (profit).

Insight drives action in communication

Customers are becoming ever-more cautious and risk averse. They need persuading more than ever that what you deliver to customers is worth paying for. Make sure your value proposition is robust, well articulated and consistently applied across all your communications. Simply listing the benefits of your proposition (or worse still, just the features) will not cut it any more. You need to find an insight that resonates with a need in the target audience: something that encapsulates the entirety of the value that your proposition can bring. It may be obvious and straightforward and it may be oblique but powerful. Whatever it is, find ways to illustrate that you UNDERSTAND the markets' needs BETTER than your competitors.

Darwin did not say 'survival of the fittest'

What he actually said was **"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."** There is no doubt that 'times are a-changing' and in ways we are finding more and more difficult to predict. Therefore, we should prepare ourselves for change and expect it to happen. Why not scenario plan for the best or worst that could happen? Look at every significant customer and create a plan for them halving or doubling in value to your business. As we always say 'hope for the best but plan for the worst'.

Stop listening to the news

Of course we must always be aware of the global economic conditions but the media thrive on headlines and, currently, bad news is good news for the media. Bad news begets bad news: it's a vicious circle. However, none of your businesses have gone bad overnight have they? They didn't become bad value or inappropriate value propositions just because a few banks got greedy did they? Have confidence in your brand and what it delivers. So, only turn the news on 10 minutes into bulletins so you can avoid all the doom and gloom and go straight to the 'puppy rescued from well' story – you'll feel better for it.

Make yourself accountable

Marketing as a function of business has historically been one of the first overheads to be cut in times of financial downturn. Marketing professionals have often struggled to avoid axe-wielding Finance Directors hacking huge swathes out of their budgets. Why is this? It's because marketing as a function is not seen as accountable as other business functions.

So take the bull by the horns: introduce a customer valuation methodology; set clear marketing goals with milestones; develop, present and promote a fully configured and costed written marketing plan for the next three years; formally measure marketing progress every quarter and publish the results; and adopt a collaborative attitude to your colleagues in Finance.

Differentiate any way you can

Human brains are hard wired to notice what is different – not what is the same. So if all of your competitors are hacking prices you should find a DIFFERENT way to compete. Maybe a completely different creative approach may cut through the market noise? Perhaps a new and innovative payment scheme might tempt buyers back from competitors. You might consider a 100% money back guarantee – they engender great confidence in buyers and are rarely exploited. Remember it's about delivering VALUE rather than simply a low price.

Align your sales and marketing efforts

Nobody can afford for market and sales teams to be working to different agendas. Everyone in business has one common goal: to acquire and retain customers. The sales and marketing teams are both integral to achieving this common goal.

So, clear the decks. Sit down with your sales colleagues and agree a common purpose for the acquisition and retention of customers this year. Agree to communicate better with each other and to listen to feedback from each other in order to make your marketing and sales efforts more effective.

Understand the difference between effectiveness and efficiency

When budgets are tight it is important that we recognise the marketing actions that are effective and those which need to be undertaken more efficiently. The two concepts are often confused or the terms used interchangeably. 'Effective' is about doing the right things: those that create the greatest outcome or effect. By doing things more 'efficiently' the same outcome can be achieved but using less resources to achieve it. So choose the right things and do them well.

Nobody EVER cut their way to growth

You may have to sacrifice some peripheral activities or some of the newer product development ideas but no one has ever cut their way to growth. Ever. That's not to say some careful pruning now won't stimulate growth later but wholesale, drastic cuts in activity or customer relationships will kill the lifeblood of your organisation: customer acquisition and retention.

Apparently, the world has NOT stopped spinning on its axis

The world goes on, business still has to do business, customers still need to be served and relationships maintained. Be faithful to your brand's promise and have courage. History shows that those businesses that market their way through recessions come out stronger on the other side. Make sure your brand is one of them.

We hope these tips offer you some hope and comfort in these interesting times. If you want to find out how to make them work for you and your creative communications NOW then call or email me: Geraint Holliman at geraint@open-sky.co.uk or 01256 385600.