

Advertising, Marketing & Beating the Recession 4 Steps to Get New Customers in a Weak Economy

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Communicating a message that is relevant to today's consumers, who have tighter budgets, is integral for growth in this recession. The down economy offers some unique marketing opportunities to get the right message out - new ways to separate your company's image from your competitors and new opportunities to achieve great long-term success.

Show Stability

No matter how good the price, typically customers don't want to work with companies that are going out of business, or who aren't stable. After quoting a job and finalizing all the specifications, the last thing I want to hear is that my chosen vendor will be closed by the time I plan to order, or might not be around in a year when I want to reorder.

As well, when money is tight, some businesses have been known to cut corners. Whether you're ordering a million widgets or your lunch at the corner deli, a business that is nickel and diming every task is probably not going to provide the best products or services.

In a weak economy, when many companies are closing, it becomes even more important that consumers know you are strong, stable, and viable. For some, just simply running advertisements will present an image of strength. Consumers will think, "Gee, XYZ Corp must be strong if they can afford to advertise right now". Good advertising will then incorporate a timely, benefit-oriented message, so that potential customer says, "XYZ Corp seems really stable, and they understand what is important to me. I should give them a try."

Stability communicates a message that your company is reliable and dependable. If your competitors can't afford the same level of promotion, the connection is made "I guess Brand X isn't doing so well - they must not be as good." Brand stability keeps customers coming back, and can generate new interest.

Stability and presence are linked when it comes to marketing. If your company has participated in a trade show every year for the last 10 years, and this year you don't, you may be projecting an image of weakness. Obviously participation must be balanced with a return on your investment, but its important to not cut advertising without analyzing the consequences.

Realize the Opportunity for New Customers

With today's tight budgets, customers are more focused on the bottom line. People are shopping around and quoting more. They are searching for new options which will save them money and are looking for companies that fulfill their needs better (ie. offer better value). For many consumers, finding new vendors with lower prices is an absolute necessity, as there is only certain money available. The benefits of cost and value outweigh old connections.

In any economy, advertising and marketing work to enforce and improve brand presence. In a slowing economy where people are seeking out new options, there is an increased likelihood that a magazine ad, a radio spot or a direct mailer will generate immediate action because people are looking. The opportunity to expand your customer base is there - make sure people find you.

Sell to the Down Economy

In a slow economy people are actively looking for new vendors that offer lower costs and better value. Marketing and advertising should address the fact that times are tough. Talk about the cost - offer a coupon,

run a sale or lower prices for past customers. Ignoring the economy ignores one of the major issues that is important to customers.

If direct cost reduction doesn't work for your product or order process, explain to customers why dollars spent at your company have a higher return than money spent elsewhere. Will there be less product failure, reducing maintenance costs? Is your product more user friendly requiring less training? Is your company larger and able to reduce shipping costs? Just as Compaq computers improved its features for great return (see our white paper How to Make Customers Chose You), talk about what customers want to hear - your value.

Your products probably won't change in the slowing economy, but your advertising message can.

Reevaluate Your Message

Promoting lower prices may not be the best message for your company or its products, but the economic issue is still out there. Today's consumer mentality is different from the mindset people had just a year ago. Is the brand message you are marketing still relevant to your consumer?

Now is the time to revisit your brand's image and determine is it still effective, or if it is as important as other benefits. If you can't or don't want to promote lower prices, revisit how your company fulfills the needs of today's customer. Do you quote quickly? Do you offer 24-hour support? Do you have better compliance to order specifications? Look for the USB - the Unique Selling Benefit - what your business offers that others don't. It's probably not the same message that worked in a good economy.

If customers used to buy your product because it's more compact, that benefit may have become less important than its cost, now that budgets are tight. Readdress your benefits and make them relevant to the economy. Maybe the compact size of your product also reduces shipping costs. Brand messages need to be relevant.

While you need to address the economic climate, it's important to remember that cost isn't always the right benefit to focus on. Good marketing will communicate a message your customers want to hear. If you're selling \$50 bottles of tequila, it's unlikely you'll increase sales by offering a 50¢ coupon (in fact, you'll probably hurt your brand). People are still looking for a product that offers what is important to them, and their viewpoint has likely been affected by today's economic situation.

Market your unique benefits guided by your consumer's mentality - maybe sell the tequila as the most consistent so every bottle is good, or promote that it's made only from blue agave plants which gives it a better taste, or maybe its just the image that it is exclusive. Compel customers to choose your product.

Always, always, give a relevant benefit. Putting a logo out there does very little - typically just some brand reinforcement for your existing customers. Good branding needs a message.

Keep in mind, getting attention and getting people to act are two entirely different animals. They guy who streaks the quad in college will get attention, but people aren't going to buy Adidas socks because they saw him wearing them. No matter how in-your-face someone thinks their ads are, or how many times it runs, if consumers don't care about the message it's a complete waste of time and money.