

**THE SEVEN SECRETS
OF
SUCCESSFUL ADVERTISING**

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INTRODUCTION

Before the invention of the printing press, advertising was a simple process. There were no secrets. A sign was simply put up over the door and the town crier was paid to direct attention to the merchandise.

Then came the seventeenth century when merchants and manufacturers become media-conscious. First there were newspapers, then magazines. Town and country fairs became shows, exhibitions, and — by the nineteenth century — great international expositions. Advertising began to get complicated, then — to make matters worse — along came the twentieth century and, first the broadcast media, then the internet.

Today, advertising is a complex industry. To many people attempting to communicate their products and services — whether to the public, to trade or to industry — the secrets for successful advertising can appear as complex and closely guarded as those of the CIA, the old KGB and MI5 all rolled into one.

Broken down, however, the many different medias of today are doing no more, nor less, than did the symbols and town criers of old. The town crier was employed in order to communicate with the potential customers who did not pass by the sign. The newspaper or magazine advertisement of the present day is placed to communicate the message to the potential customer who did not drive past the billboard. It's all relative!

That, of course, is not a secret! It's an observation born out of logic. The seven secrets of successful advertising do, however, follow the same logical approach. The fiction aired and printed about the advertising industry has made it difficult for the general public to equate logic with the gloss of Madison Avenue. But, for all that, logic and creativity must go hand-in-hand to develop advertising that is successful.



RESEARCH, STUDY AND ASSESSMENT OF THE MARKET

The first secret is the same one that holds true of learning to be successful at just about anything — simply research, study and assessment of the market.

Think about the market — the potential customers, the end users. Who are they? What sort of people are they and what kind of lifestyle do they have? What are they using the product for? How can it be adapted to meet the requirements of other end product specifications? A retailer can pull out a map and draw a circle around the trading area. A manufacturer must think about who the end users are and where they are located geographically in respect to the dealers or distributors of the product.

Once the consumers are identified, some very pertinent questions must be asked. Is the market growing? Or is it declining? If the fact that this is a growing market can be determined, more must be learnt about its characteristics. Age. Income. Sex. Business interests. Recreational interests. Why do these people

buy the product? Why do other people buy from the competition? If, on close inspection, a declining market is foreseen — and this happens — perhaps some thought should be given to relocating or diversifying. Retailers often lose a market when a large shopping mall opens nearby. And, in today's commercial climate, many products are at the mercy of a faddish society. One moment there's a big demand for the item or service — the next, it becomes a necessity to diversify or get out of the business.

Then, there are questions that must be asked about the competition. Has the number of competitive plants or outlets increased recently? Is one competitor doing better than the rest? If so, who is he appealing to? Take a look at your own operation — how competitive it is? In packaging? In promotion? In price? Then take a good look at the market segments. Is there one which is being neglected by you or your competitors? Can the product be tailored to the needs of this segment?

After making an in-depth study of the market and the competition, it's a good idea to take a good hard look at the present environment. Are there, or are there likely to be, changes in lifestyle or demographics which will have an effect — positive or negative — on your business? Are there economic factors — nationally, internationally or locally — that could affect the business? And, this applies more to manufacturers than to retailers, are there technological developments in the air to which your business could be vulnerable?

Once you start analysing your market in this way, there will, no doubt, be many more questions to which

honest answers must be provided. But, keep on asking these questions — too many businesses fail because changing circumstances are not noticed until it is too late. All the advertising in the world is not going to bring success if nobody is listening. Or if there are a hundred other “*better mousetraps*”!



THE FIVE-PART ACTION PLAN

The second secret is putting together a five part action plan for effective advertising. This consists of integrating the five *Ps* — Place, Product, Price, Positioning and Promotion.

PLACE

The importance of *Place* naturally depends on the business. For the manufacturer, place — or location — is determined by accessibility to customers, the feasibility of transportation in of raw materials and the transportation out of finished goods. For the distributor, the same types of conditions generally apply, along with accessibility to suppliers. For the retailer, place is governed by such factors as availability of convenient parking for customers, public transport and whether or not the location is in a good, stable commercial environment as opposed to one which is likely to decline in a few short years.

Related to place — from the standpoint of an action plan — is the making of an honest assessment of just

how well known the business really is to both customers and potential customers as compared to how well known it needs to be in order to be profitable.

PRODUCT

From the retailer's viewpoint, *Product* involves the decision on the range of products, brands and goods being offered. And choosing a decor or environment that complements the product. For example, nobody expects to successfully sell jewellery in the kind of surroundings in which tires are sold. Employees — your salespeople — must have in-depth knowledge of the products they sell. For the manufacturer or distributor product considerations are more complex. Sales people must have specialized knowledge, particularly if target consumers are involved in specific and highly specialized disciplines.

PRICE

Price, of course, is very closely related to just who the identified consumers and potential customers are. It is ultimately tied to image, reputation, the level of quality and the quantity produced. And price is also dependent upon the niche in the market place that you see as yours.

The most important thing to bear in mind is never try to mix quality with quantity. Dress stores which attempt to sell designer fashions at discount prices invariably end up stocking real discount fashions and becoming perceived as a discount store. If you manufacture a luxury item, don't panic when your competitor cuts his price! If you follow suit, you'll never

again be perceived as having a quality image. Instead use his strategy to your own advantage — turn it into an opportunity to reinforce your own superior image. Conversely, if you have a discount or clearance market all sewn up, never attempt to upgrade your image. Know a good thing when you see it and be content to show a profit. If you really aspire to selling quality, start another company and position it to appeal to a more upscale market. But take a look at some of the millionaires who made their fortunes catering to the masses, before you make that kind of decision.

POSITIONING

Many marketing educators refer to the four *Ps* because they were taught or developed their own theories in the pre-positioning era. Today, however, *Positioning* is as important — more important to many — as the original four *Ps*. Basically positioning is the gaining of awareness through association. This can be association with the product, association with a certain segment of the market or association with a competing product.

The first — association with the product — is the most desirable. Never delay being the first store in town to sell widgets! The “*firstest with the mostest*” is the most overlooked advantage to being successful, simply because it involves taking a chance. Wait till somebody else takes the risk and the great advantage is lost.

Association with a particular segment of the market involves finding that segment — it requires being intuitive, introspective and observant. A good example of this kind of positioning is the observance of the large

numbers of citizens of the same ethnic background and the subsequent opening of a restaurant or grocery store catering to their culinary tastes. Certain products, when targeted to specific market segments quickly become associated exclusively with that segment. This is not to say that they are exclusively purchased by such a segment. Spill over quickly ensures that they become desirable to other consumers. For example, positioning quality stereo components against an audience of true audiophiles produces a perceived desirability for the products among other consumers in the market for such products, simply because of the positioning stance.

The third type of positioning is not seen to any great extent in terms of the retail operation, although it can be done very effectively. In terms of brand advertising, the relating of Seven-Up to colas by the *Uncola* campaign and the instant comparison of Avis with Hertz through the *Avis is No. 2* campaign are the standard examples. This type of positioning is best adopted only after intensive research has been carried out to ensure its credibility.

PROMOTION

Whatever decisions are made with regard to *Place*, *Product*, *Price* and *Positioning*, they will have little effect unless they are properly promoted. On the other side of the coin, *Promotion* cannot take place until the other four *Ps* have all been determined. These are the pertinent questions:

What is the objective of your promotion activity?

Are you creating a demand for a product or service?

How will you effectively reach your target market?

And how should you appeal to it?

Is a specialized media applicable?

Can the promotion be accurately evaluated?

The answers to these questions will clarify the position that should be taken on promotional activities. Budget allocations must be made based on these answers. For instance, if you are pioneering a new product, you'll need to make use of the most often seen medias. This will require a large budget. Whereas, if your product is best promoted through recommendation, public relations activity will be more appropriate. This is less costly, but far more time consuming to everybody involved.



THE AXIS PERSON

The third secret tends — in this era of team accomplishment — to become thoroughly discredited. People are so busy claiming their place on the team that they tend to overlook the efforts of the quarterback, the pitcher, the coxswain — the axis person. Collaboration is effective. But that is what it is — collaboration. Responsibility for complete, co-ordinated and cost-effective marketing communications must still rest with one person. This is true — however large or small the organization is — because it takes a single person to ensure that the product's positioning is reflected in all marketing and sales programs. Only a single person can analyse the collected input of the collaborators, in an unbiased manner, so that the most effective mix of marketing communications channels is utilized, and continually monitored and evaluated. This person must be chosen well — even if it means doing yourself out of a job!

Depending upon the size of the organization, this axis person either works with the advertising agency or handles the execution of advertising and promotions strategies himself or herself. In either situation, he or she — very obviously — must have a thorough knowledge of marketing, the industry and marketing as applied to the industry. And this expertise should also have been put to the test. In other words, he or she should be highly experienced.

There's a very famous old ad — written in 1924 — which applies today, just as it did then and, most probably, always will:

“There is only one solution to an advertising problem:

Find the Man!”

Modern technology can certainly provide great assistance, but it can never replace human endeavour in developing successful advertising. And, although they may make a lot of noise, the members of a team can never *collectively* fine-tune a program for success. So, never expect miracles or to have Lady Luck beaming over your shoulder - there's no more a substitute for hard slogging in advertising than there is in any other aspect of your business!



THE ADVERTISING PLAN

Developing an advertising plan is the fourth secret. Advertising doesn't just happen — that is, successful advertising doesn't just happen. Lots of advertising does just happen. But that's all it does.

It takes experienced analytical and creative skills to develop successful advertising. And it takes disciplined planning to execute what is developed. Far too often marketers fall into the trap of impulse decision. They see something work for somebody else and eagerly take a flying leap onto the band wagon only to find that... it doesn't work for them. Plan your advertising and stick with your plan! There are five very basic steps:

Set your budget.

Prepare a calendar.

Identify your customer profile.

Select the appropriate form of advertising.

Choose the right media,

There are a number of methods of setting an advertising budget. The quickest and easiest method is the percentage-of-sales method. This method is fine when sales are good, but, unfortunately, tends — when sales are bad — to result in a reduced budget just when investment is needed most. Other methods are using a percentage of gross profit, allocating dollars on a per unit projected sales basis or, in the case of manufacturers or distributors, allocating X number of dollars per outlet. Some advertisers even base their budget on what their competitors are spending, allocate what they feel they can afford or even *go for broke* if the need arises! However, setting a budget and staying with it should have priority.

Once the budget is established, a calendar — spanning the budgeted period — should be prepared, and adhered to. Identify the market by analysing the research discussed in the first secret and keep this identified market in mind all the time. Selecting the appropriate form of advertising and choosing the right media are dependent upon targeting this identified market. This could mean using print advertisements in business publications to communicate with users of the products of an original equipment manufacturer or raw materials processor. Or, it could mean radio advertising to target a specific consumer audience for a retailer or distributor. Success is often dependent upon reaching the right people through the vehicle to which they are most likely to relate.



DETERMINING THE RIGHT IMAGE

These last two points are also dependent. to some extent, upon the fifth secret — determining the right image. Here, again, it is best to ask a few questions to clarify direction. The two most important ones are:

How are you perceived by your publics?

How do you want to be perceived?

The term “publics” means all publics — customers, potential customers, banks, professional organizations and clubs, employees and suppliers — everybody!

Define clearly the perception that is required for success. It is of the utmost importance that you do so because if you don't determine how you want to be perceived, you can't begin to project the image required to achieve that perception. You can't even begin to communicate. In fact, while bright ideas by themselves are not an assurance of marketability or profitability, *goodwill* is always a negotiable asset. And goodwill can only be achieved through an image that has been

communicated and is subsequently recognizable as “you”.

How is this desirable image of an organization communicated? There are many ways – in fact, the corporate image is communicated whenever contact with a public is made. Advertising, naturally, must reflect it. So must packaging, product literature, the corporate logo, telemarketing and customer service. Public relations is of great importance. There are corporate images which have been built on public relations alone — although this is not something that can be recommended to every organization. Well executed public relations will, however, go a very long way in communicating the desired image.

Communications, through the press and electronic medias, are the primary goals of public relations. There are some important guidelines, however, which should be adhered to when attempting to communicate a corporate image through these medias:

Never expect deferential treatment just because you are an advertiser — the first duty of the press is to the public.

The item must be newsworthy, well written and dated.

Select the media for which your news is suited.

Never mislead — it'll come back to haunt you. You can count on it.

Never expect your sales representative to get it in for you and, instead, always address the appropriate editorial person.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication — from a complete perspective — is the sixth secret. There are two very quotable quotes that apply here. Mark Twain once said, *“The spider looks for a merchant who doesn’t advertise so he can spin a web across his door and lead a life of undisturbed peace!”* And the master of hyperbole, Phineas T. Barnum, tells us, *“Advertise, or the chances are that the sheriff will do it for you!”* However, advertising for the sake of doing the right thing is not the correct procedure. Advertising must be a part of the over all communications plan.

An effective communications plan has five points.

The first is to be different or to offer something different — this is the USP, the unique selling proposition.

The second is to get action — by making an offer or attracting attention.

Thirdly the potential customer must become involved — make good your promise.

The fourth point is to inject some emotion into the advertising appeal — surprise, humour, excitement, any emotion which will force the audience to relate to it

And the fifth is to communicate commitment to service.



EVALUATION AND MONITORING ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The seventh secret of successful advertising is the one which so many people never manage to learn. Yet it is the one which actually determines the extent of success. The seventh secret must be indelibly printed upon the mind. The seventh secret is the evaluation and monitoring of all advertising and communication. The sales effectiveness of your marketing action must be continually monitored. This must never be forgotten, put off or overlooked.

Awareness, recall, attitudes and usage are the four key areas to be monitored. And how you go about it can range from the use of sophisticated market research to simply talking to your customers. Assess the effectiveness of your advertising and there will be no difficulty in understanding that logic and creativity must go hand in-hand to result in successful advertising.

A simple sales graph effectively illustrates the success or failure of your efforts in terms of usage of the product or service. Kept constantly updated, such a marketing

tool will indicate whether your advertising is increasing sales or, and this is often even more important, whether lack of advertising results in lack of sales. Advertising which creates and builds awareness of a product is sometimes cancelled as a cost-reducing measure, resulting in the bottom dropping out of the sales. The point, then, is not just to measure the growth of sales but, also, the effect of the advertising on the sales.

Telephone research can often assist in determining the impact of the advertising message. The advertising of high turnover products benefits from such research more than products or services for which repeat purchase is not required. If the message is not being recalled or — worse, few people recognize the name, the situation must be remedied. For the small business, simply asking the customer where he found out about the product or service is most economical.

The attitude of consumers to the product and its advertising can also be determined from both these methods of research. It is important to remember, here that the advertising, itself, actually develops the consumer attitude towards the product. Therefore, keeping informed as to how it is in fact perceived provides a guide to its efficiency and effectiveness.

Despite the many complexities of modern day advertising, even the seventh secret is born of logic!



CONCLUSION

Marketing communications really haven't changed over the centuries. The creative marketer who applies logic to the planning, development, execution and follow-through of the advertising program will be successful in communicating the benefits of the product or service, and — as long as the product itself lives up to its promise — will be equally successful in selling it for years to come.

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