



PERSPECTIVES Fall 2003

Direct Marketing 101

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**Lecture to University of North Carolina
Advertising Majors
Chapel Hill, North Carolina October 2003**

One of our jobs as marketers is to enhance the way a customer feels about a brand and its products and services beyond just using them.

How do we go about bringing a brand to life for the consumer?

When I look at a brand, and begin to create a brand's messaging, I imagine a house. The upper floor represents the brand's expression of what it stands for...the brand's mission statement. This expression usually takes the form of long TV spots that do nothing more than extol the virtues of the brand, such as the Nike experience of "PLAY," or the Disney experience of "MAGIC" as examples.

The floor below is where the brand's actual products and services are showcased. This is the world of thirty-second commercials and product print ads, which are intended to make us aware of a product's differentiated attributes, such as an ad for a specific new Nike shoe, or an awareness ad for a new Disney film.

The next story down is really where all the action is. This is where the brand's

hard work gets done, where a customer's relationship with a brand really comes to life...through direct marketing. Here, the brand has the chance to reach out to consumers and create a dialogue from consumer to brand and brand to consumer, because this is where the brand has the chance to demonstrate it really understands what you need and how its products or services can help you cope better. This is where most consumers really experience the brand. This is truly where a brand lives via Direct-Response Marketing.

Direct-Response is a form of advertising, just as branding is a form of advertising and awareness building is a form of advertising. But only Direct-Response advertising uses all the media in its communications, such as TV, print, mail, radio, telephone and the Internet.

But what you'll see with Direct Marketing is that overall, it is a little bit more of a rational sell, with a greater emphasis on communicating the offer and the call-to-action than general advertising.

What are the basics of Direct-Response marketing or dialogue marketing?

- Direct Marketing connects the consumer directly to the marketer.
- Direct Marketing communicates the sales message and provides a response device (phone number/URL) through which consumers can buy.
- Retail stores or distributors are not needed.

Here's a quick comparison of General Advertising versus Direct Marketing:

- Both sell goods and services
- Both appeal to large groups of consumers
- Both use product differentiation and segmentation
- Both approach consumers through mass media
- Both reflect a brand image for the product

But there are some primary differences:

Direct Response

Targets specific individuals
Establishes a dialogue
Sells to individuals through direct channels (TV, print, mail, telephone, Internet)
Identifies customers by name, address, purchasing behavior, sharing common characteristics

General Advertising

Targets groups
Creates monologues
Sells to groups through indirect channels (TV, print, OOH)
Identifies buyers as a group

Finally, Direct Marketing is totally accountable. Because of response devices

(telephone number, mail surveys, etc.) we can track the impact of a campaign almost immediately to show which offers and creative works and which doesn't.

Because Direct-Response work is so in touch with consumers, with the dialogues it creates and the data it generates, it can be more in touch with a consumer's wants and needs than any other form of communications program.

But now I'm going to say something that is going to piss off a lot of people here this week in Cannes. The advertising industry is facing a paradigm shift. Until recently, many major advertisers approached business as a brand building venture. Their philosophy...get the brand to be top of mind and people will buy. They invested millions of dollars in advertising with specific communication goals...that if they could reach a specific number of people, the right number of times then business would thrive. Very little emphasis was placed on consumer wants and needs.

More marketers are realizing that the deeper, longer-lasting connections consumers develop with their brand, is through Direct Marketing. They are also realizing the cost accountability of Direct vs. General. So more and more general advertising dollars are shifting to Direct Marketing.

But the key to good marketing communications is that you must connect with the consumer so they will pay attention to what it is you're trying to say. How do we do that?

Lester Wunderman, the founder of Wunderman and the man who is credited with inventing the practice of Direct Marketing, really defines the best way to break through and connect:

"The consumer, not the product must be the hero.

You must meet a customer's specific needs and bring value to that

customer in order for him to purchase your product and remain loyal to your brand.”

I think that the public is willing to give up their attention to advertisers who give them something in return. Create a simple value exchange. “Entertain me, teach me, tell me something I want to know. Make me laugh, support events that interest me. I’ll watch/pay attention/I’ll open the mail package, if you tell me something I really care about.”

Because, after all, all we’re trying to do is to turn what the client wants to say into something the consumer wants to hear.

It is the relevance of the message that separates general advertising from Direct Marketing. Direct Marketing, through this relevant connection, creates dialogues with consumers. General advertising creates monologues. Wouldn’t you rather be spoken with than be spoken to?

So my definition of good marketing is one that makes a connection with the consumer through relevant creative insights. “Good creative is relevant creative.” And in no way am I saying “mediocre” creative. Did you know that 70% of all award winners at the Cannes Advertising Awards Festival are examples of effective advertising?

But there is a dilemma. How can we create this relevance? There is so much clutter out there. It’s said that the average consumer sees over 2,500 marketing messages a day. That hurts my head to think about it. What do you remember from yesterday’s onslaught?

It’s ironic because today, in a world where we are more seemingly connected than ever before with cell phones, pda’s, etc.—it’s getting more and more difficult to reach us. I don’t mean in the conventional sense, but in a way that truly gets our attention.

So we need to be able to create work that will truly break through, make a connection and be relevant. Let’s consider how to get relevant and make a connection with each of our media opportunities.

Let’s start with Direct-Response TV. There are three components to great DRTV:

- First, why do people sit in front of the TV? To be entertained
So successful DRTV must entertain
- Secondly, DRTV must make a relevant connection with the consumer
- Thirdly, one must make the offer relevant to the idea of the commercial
A DRTV spot that runs a branded message for forty-five seconds and then throws in an offer that’s not relevant to the idea of the spot, will neither communicate the brand message well, nor the offer well

When it’s done right, it will create something I call “Branded Acquisition.” A fancy name for a commercial that builds brands and sells the offer simultaneously and seamlessly.

But heed the adage of effective advertising; you still need a good idea. And the acid test of a good idea is: can it survive the onslaught of title cards and phone numbers? I believe you can’t kill a good idea simply because it has a phone number on it.

The print area is where Direct-Response and general advertising are most similar. The only difference is that the Direct piece will have a much more prominent offer and



call-to-action than its general counterpart. They both still will need exciting, creative headlines and visuals to make that initial impact to break through the clutter.

With mail, the key component is an offer and a creative execution that will break through the clutter and cause someone to open the package. If the project can afford it, an intriguing package will help stage the offer, much like a storybook presents its story. If the project is a simple envelope, make sure the headline connects with the consumer and the offer is never understated.

Another thing about direct marketing is that, while it can work on a project-by-project basis, it works best as a process...a series of communications with a prospect or customer.

At the center of the process is the knowledge base of the consumer. And each stage of communication leads to new, deeper insights and learning, to drive future marketing efforts.

So what does this all mean? The combination of entertainment and data-driven insights can create a relevance that will really resonate with the target and produce sales. When both are used properly, DR can sell as gracefully as general advertising. Frankly, I think DR sells better than general advertising.

When all this happens just right, the brand will become something that can go beyond just a one-time sale of a product. It will become an active entity in a consumer's life. This then creates repeat and long-time customers willing to partner with a brand and grow with it. And what client wouldn't want that as an end result?