

# Effective Marketing Requires Thoughtful Strategic Planning

By Bertha Evans

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Although the approach to marketing may vary depending on the product, service or idea being marketed, many of the key elements remain the same no matter what the topic.

Mary Phillips and Brian Treece, partners in TreecePhillips Government and Public Relations, listed the main components of an effective marketing campaign.

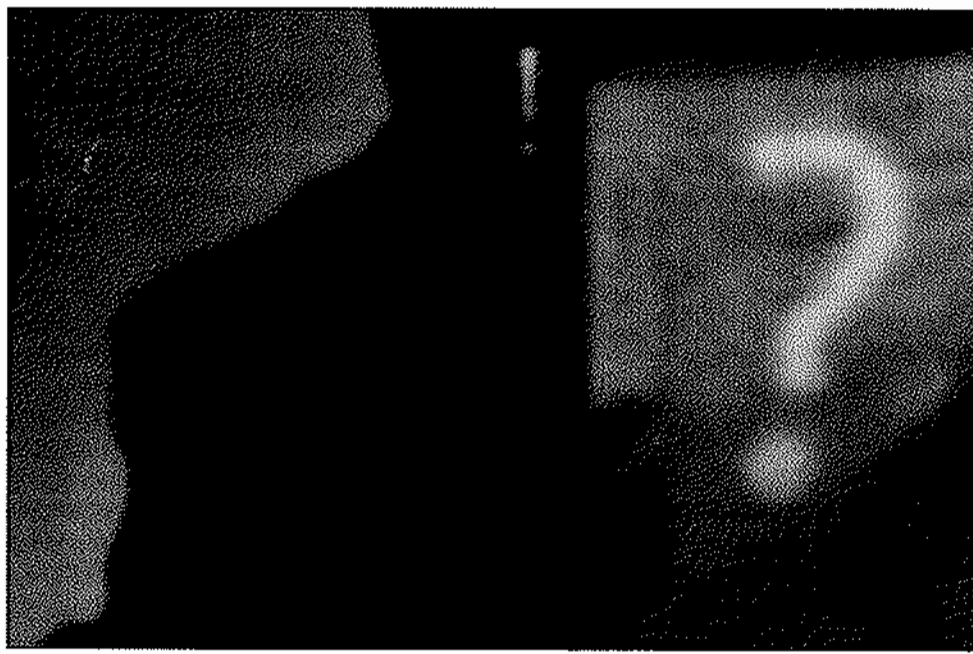
Research tops the list. It is used to gauge market need, consumer sensitivity, the target demographics, any competition, the political/economic climate and the reason why the client has come to them.

"Research reveals the scope and depth of the task at hand and allows us to present material truthfully and with confidence," Phillips said.

It is through extensive research that complicated or highly technical issues can be broken down into more manageable pieces of information, which can then be better understood by the public.

Marketing firms then perform stakeholder analysis.

"This is to determine the affected parties, shareholders, public, employees, potential employees, legislators, constituents or public officials and assess for and address potential conflicts, even within the client corporation. The unique — and sometimes conflicting — interests of each



Confusing or controversial issues require special attention and planning with help from expert strategists.

stakeholder must be understood before an effective message can be developed," Treece said. "Then comes the strategic development based on our research results and scope of the target audiences. We have found people react to issues about which they care. Addressing concerns is important, but overly personalizing issues tends to diminish the credibility of the message and the messenger. One should seek the broadest good and promote that."

Knowing the target audience is another key component that should be carefully considered and is

usually discovered during the stakeholder analysis, Treece said.

"Understanding who the stakeholders are is critical to the efficient use of funds," he said. "For local issues, why waste money on costly television, which broadcasts to a wide audience, if the message is going to unaffected parties?"

The professional consultant next tries to find creative ways to apply the strategy, Phillips said.

"Understand, the public is inundated with information and competition for attention is great," Phillips said. "Creativity helps set our firm apart and makes the media more interested in our issue, product or message."

Treece and Phillips have more than 20 years experience combined, and the firm offers an array of services to develop and present the intended message. "Our clients include CEOs needing strategic decision-making counsel

during a crisis or corporate image promotion, marketing executives seeking assistance with product roll-outs, political candidates desiring a convincing message for the public, executives needing media training and corporations needing a greater return on staff community involvement or intervention on regulatory matters," Treece said. "In any promotional campaign we undertake, we are interested in maximizing results, eliminating surprises and developing a sophisticated and comprehensive campaign."

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Unlimited Business Integrations Graphic Design concentrates primarily on print promotion, but also organizes and coordinates events. It publishes *The Jefferson City Chamber Chronicle* and *The E-Bulletin*, and completes print advertising for *The Jefferson City Business Times* and *The Mid-Missouri Business Journal* for various clients, said president of the firm Nisan Harlow-Nichols. She and her husband, Dan, also produce brochures, postcards and mailers, as well as use direct mail and Internet mailing as part of their approach and they complete many projects for charity or non-profit groups each year.

Once the plan is in motion, marketing firms analyze reactions by the stakeholders, watching closely for any change in public sentiment. Should public sentiment begin to change, their strategy also must change to meet the needs.

The type of strategy used has to depend on the products or services to be marketed, Harlow-Nichols said.

"It's about public perception, really, and should reflect the advertiser's mission statement, as well as a message that's appropriate for the economical and/or social climates," she said. "Once a campaign strategy is outlined, then we start gathering as much information as we can on the subject. The advertiser and I have to look at the current market trends for what they're selling and at the way people feel, their hopes and fears about that particular subject."

Any purchasing fears must be addressed and the advertisements should have enough information regarding the subject for the buyer to make an educated decision, Harlow-Nichols said.

Controversial issues take special care because

the topic must be clearly understood, both sides of the controversy examined and the strategy built around those facts.

"By understanding the nature of the controversy, we are able to more effectively address the concerns and present the positive elements more clearly," Treece said.

Resources that are used when researching a subject may include interviews with the client, public opinion, the Internet, experts, attorneys and various media, among others. TreecePhillips also has engaged a nationally recognized theologian who helps the firm deal with any sensitive religious issues.

Harlow-Nichols said the presentation needs to be honest.

"An advertiser can't try to pull the wool over the public's eyes. If the public feels the advertiser has been deceptive or has left something unaddressed, then ultimately the advertiser has wasted a lot of time and money," Harlow-Nichols said. "Once education and honesty is involved, the public is much more at ease and accepting of the subject."

Phillips agreed, stating honesty is the backbone to building a successful marketing firm, building strong relationships with clients and nurturing successful outcomes.

"We don't accept every client or issue that comes in the door. We are selective and committed to its success," Phillips said. "We turned down one of the world's largest retail stores but found it a firm that better fit its interests. For us, an emphasis on honesty, accuracy and integrity provides a clear direction." Her advice is to "do the homework, back up all assertions and appreciate the privilege of helping someone else." ❖

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