

## Healthcare Marketing

### Is PR the Secret to Building Successful Brands?

In the marketing world, advertising has long been the Goliath to public relations' David. A new book by marketing guru Al Ries (remember "Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind?") and his daughter Laura, challenges the wisdom of this traditional relationship by claiming that it is public relations, not advertising, that is responsible for building the world's most successful brands.

"The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR" is full of examples of brands that spent millions of dollars in award-winning advertising campaigns, only to lose market share and share of mind. In contrast, the brands that have become dominant are those that used PR - over a period of years and even decades - to slowly capture the public's imagination and preferences.

Wait a minute - building a brand over years, even decades? In today's 24/7 world, what company has the time and patience to wait that long to succeed? Perhaps that is the problem. The pressure that executives, shareholders, and investors put upon marketing to achieve quick results and rapid growth demands that marketers turn to advertising, which can guarantee exposure in whatever quantity the budget will support, quickly and efficiently. However, the number of new products that fail, and the number of brands that flounder despite creative, talked-about and widely viewed advertising campaigns, should give marketers pause - at least enough to consider the ramifications of this theory.

Why are ads ineffective in building brands? Ads attract attention, but do not motivate. Ads can create awareness and "talk value" with their creativity, becoming the punchline for today's Leno monologue or Letterman list, but lack the power to motivate people to make purchasing decisions. It is public relations that delivers credibility, that gets people talking about the merits of the product and referring it to their friends and family, that sways and motivates the decision to sample and to buy. It is public relations that must build a perception in people's minds, while it is the role of advertising to reinforce and remind about that perception.

To those who may have become accustomed to viewing public relations as a string of news releases to support a product launch, this proposed role reversal may seem quite startling. What ultimately makes the premise convincing is the realization that the primary argument is not for the supremacy of PR tactics, but PR strategy. That strategy begins with the difficult, time-consuming and often painful process of identifying the brand's position that is new, compelling, and appealing enough to attract the attention not only of media but also of potential customers. Supporting this first, one-of-a-kind positioning needs a campaign that slowly builds interest and awareness via the news media, special events, and grassroots promotion, each step of the way deepening the impression of this simple, single focus.

Many of today's top brands succeeded with this strategy: Red Bull, the first energy drink; Volvo, the safest car on the road; Starbucks, the first European-style coffee bar; Heineken, the first high-priced imported beer; Xerox, the first plain-paper

copier; Polaroid, the first instant camera; Papa John's, the first premium, upscale pizza; Ben & Jerry's, the first socially responsible ice cream; Mustang, the first sports car for people who don't like to drive sports cars; Saturn, a different kind of company and a different kind of car; and Dockers, the new casual slacks.

While the brands and campaigns cited in this book are national and international in scope, the steps to successful brand-building using PR as the foundation can be applied to local and regional products and services as well - the hospital's new heart center, for example, a new physician practice, or a regional HMO.

### **Steps to Successful Brand-Building**

1. Set up a category in the mind in which you can be first. Then make sure the new category has a motivating factor that will encourage prospects to switch from the old category to the new. For example, Altoids created the category of "strong mints" with the motivator of "curiously strong" to buy it.
2. Develop a name for the product or brand that is new, easy to remember, and that communicates the appeal of the new category. Beware of "line extensions" - keeping the name of an old product or brand and tacking on a new descriptor. Coca-Cola is the most successful brand in the world, but New Coke was a flop. Fat-Free Fig Newtons lost its category war to SnackWells. In the luxury car category, Toyota succeeded with Lexus, not Toyota Max or Toyota Ultra.
3. Identify an executive or celebrity that is a credible and articulate spokesperson for the brand. Note this is not the gimmicky "spokesperson for hire" that may appear in an ad, but the knowledgeable expert whose personality and background support their role as the expert. Think Iocacca and Chrysler, Bill Gates and Microsoft, Steve Jobs and Apple. Scientists and physicians also have the credentials to be effective spokespeople, provided they have the communication skills to make complex concepts easily understood and can communicate their excitement about how the product or service will truly help people. Celebrities can be effective as PR spokespeople when they endorse a product - but they must actually use it, as opposed to being "hired guns."
4. Create memorable tag lines and slogans using alliteration, repetition and rhyme. (Examples: Toys for Tots, Loose Lips Sink Ships, Shop Till You Drop).
5. To get the idea to take off, start small and "seed" the trade media or smaller local and regional media, using this coverage as a vehicle to build awareness and media interest leading up to the "keystone" publicity placement. The keystone placement is a positive story in a key publication or television show that can support the entire publicity campaign. (Note: most television news features, national and local, originate from stories in the print media. The television reporter looks for a visual approach or new angle to cover the story a different way). These positive stories help the brand establish its credentials as the industry leader in this category. Carefully consider the media that will print new, original stories and those that will run the story with a new angle after someone else has done it.
6. As the brand is being built, seek all suitable vehicles for publicity. Once the brand is established, become selective about publicity. Trends last a long time, fads do not. At the first sign of a fad, put on the PR brakes.
7. As the brand becomes successful, resist the temptation to expand its "share of mind" to other audience segments. Instead, create a new brand with a new name and positioning to capture this new market. "Not Your Father's

Oldsmobile" is an example of a campaign that failed to capture a younger market. What young person wants a car called an "olds?" Accept what you already own in the mind, and invest in deepening and broadening your share of mind in that space. Remember that a new brand has much more publicity potential than a line extension of an old brand. Pharmaceutical companies understand this and will create a drug with a new name but similar ingredients as the old one, but for a different purpose, then capitalize on the PR driven by the new name and the new category.

8. Can old brands be resuscitated with PR? Yes. Sales of Bayer aspirin are on the rise with the promotion of its use in preventing heart attacks.

If public relations is driving the marketing bus, what's the role of advertising? Once share of mind is captured through publicity, advertising is important for reinforcing a leadership position. While PR is required to build new brands, advertising is necessary to support "old" brands once they are established.

In conclusion, marketing strategists must recognize that we can't force our way into a prospect's mind. Advertising is like the wind - the harder it blows, the tighter the man clings to his coat. But when the sun of PR shines, the coat is soon shed and the bet won. Allowing a soundly planned and well-executed PR program to unfold step-by-step will lay the foundation for long-term success and a brand that stands the test of time.

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