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Internal Communications Failures That Can Flat-Line Your Marketing Campaigns

By: *Melanie Brenneman*

You have the most amazing marketing year planned. It has been immaculately researched, budgeted for and planned. It employs creative imagery and succinct, relevant and engaging messages and calls to action. So why is it tanking before you even launch it? Oftentimes, if you are facing internal pushback or a lack of company awareness, the culprit can be internal communications. Here are four ways not prioritizing internal communications can impale your campaigns.

1. Absence of Alignment

Is your company's big picture goal simply to "sell more"?

Believe me, *every* company wants to do this. (And I want to help them do this.) But more thought needs to go into the process to ensure cohesiveness with the C-suite and its expectations. What are the company's vision and goals? Over what time period does the company hope to accomplish these goals? What strategic growth expectations have been shared as priorities?

If none of this is communicated beyond the board room or C-suite, it jeopardizes the company's chances to attain them.

These goals serve as a focal point for all company efforts. Each employee should be able to recite them. The goals help all departments, including marketing, to create a solid base for their own strategies and corresponding initiatives. They reinforce awareness of the long-term priorities as opposed to short-term distractions (aka the "SQUIRREL!!!" syndrome). They also set up a benchmark for demonstrating success – especially for marketing.

2. Reactive Marketing

Communicating marketing strategies and goals is as important as communicating company strategies and goals. Why? Because awareness keeps scenarios like this from happening.

[Company executive runs into the room with a panicked look on her face and says]: "*Our competitor has booked a Super Bowl ad. Why haven't we done that?*"

Okay, so maybe it isn't as drastic as a Super Bowl commercial. It could be anything ranging from a sponsorship to a website redesign. And because your company has not embarked on similar marketing activities, investors will gnash their teeth, children will cry and the world will now end.

Companies have to know what their competitors are up to and how they position and market themselves against them. That is smart business that can result in invaluable leads in a tight market. But that does not mean you have to hyper-focus your marketing efforts to match theirs pace for pace. This type of reactive marketing is a lot like obsessing over where their boat is sailing while steering your own ship onto a sandbar.



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You do not want to just match the marketing of your competitor – you want to market better than they are.

Ensure that stakeholders understand marketing priorities, goals and strategies to help them see if they are suggesting a great marketing tactic or just simply copycatting.

Now don't get me wrong. I have seen some well-thought-out campaigns that target competitors by playing off recent news or product releases. But these initiatives are firmly guided by the company's overall goals and awareness of what the company is, what it wants to accomplish and how it can do that. They are not just playing follow the leader.

3. Cutting the Runway

Do not take this as an endorsement for ineffective marketing endeavors and spending. What we are specifically addressing is the very important need to plot out marketing campaigns and communicate their expected and actual progress over time with key stakeholders.

B2B marketing takes time. Depending on the product, the price point and the market, it can often span a year to 18 months (if not longer) from the top of the funnel to signing the client. It is a long, complex process nurtured by well-researched and well-executed marketing efforts.

Everyone knows this. But no one wants to wait for results.

You can have the most meticulously researched, designed and executed marketing campaign ever, but I guarantee you that someone in the company will want to pull the plug if results are not showing up in the time frame he or she personally thinks is appropriate.

For each marketing campaign, the overall timeline and schedule of goal attainment have to be properly communicated and agreed upon with key executives before it launches. That sets up a valuable framework, manages expectations and creates a strong measurement process.

Do not think short term and cut the runway. Give the marketing campaign room to roll out as planned before determining if it is effective or not. Evaluate performance along the way to measure if it is hitting the set goals within the timeline. And remember – this is long ball.

4. Design Decisions Through Collaboration ... and Collaboration ... and Collaboration

Design – whether it is an entire rebranding or a nametag – can evoke passionate responses within a company. Everyone inevitably wants to weigh in with a perspective. And doubtless there are some very insightful perspectives in your company. But what is strength can also become a big problem.

There is a complex thought process behind design – from color to font to placement to aesthetic. While it can elicit an emotional response, each design choice is based on logical decisions. Take color for example. Orange connotes playfulness and stimulates emotions. Purple implies royalty, while blue is an almost universally liked color. Each shade brings on a general emotional or even a physiological response.

But when internal executives or individuals outside of marketing are involved, a clean and crisp design can quickly become a cloudy, muddy mess. One person might not like the color. Another might want to add more words or messages.

Hey, I am not saying kick the CEO away from the design buy-in table. What I am saying is that by not communicating the logic behind the design and reiterating the company's goals and marketing strategies, you are setting your design up for a disaster by endless committee feedback. *And* you might end up with something looking like this:



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Remember, communications can make or break marketing – both for internal stakeholders and external prospects. Taking the time to make sure marketing goals, strategies, logic and timelines work together ensures that your marketing efforts float instead of flat-line.

About the Author

An avid marketer, Melanie Brenneman has more than 14 years of experience meeting the communication needs of small businesses and Fortune 500 corporations alike. In her spare time, she volunteers as president for the Austin chapter of the American Marketing Association and tries to limit her Girl Scout cookie purchases to 45 boxes a year.



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