



The one resolution marketers must keep in 2007

Excited about your New Year's resolutions? Or are you secretly resigned to accepting something less than success in 2007? Don't be. Not when you have a single, achievable resolution—plus a step-by-step plan to keep you on track.

By Patrick Byers

Since 2007 marks Outsource Marketing's 10th anniversary, this article originally included 10 marketing resolutions. But most people can't even remember a couple things they resolved to do last year, so let's keep it simple.

"In 2007, I'm going to improve my marketing."

Here are the essential steps to achieve that goal:

1. Review your entire program
2. Write or refine your marketing plan
3. Implement your plan, tracking results as you go
4. Apply lessons learned

Step one: Review everything

When is the last time you fully reviewed your marketing efforts? The New Year is the perfect time to reflect and apply lessons learned. Here are some areas to consider:

Past marketing and communications. What's working? What isn't? Review your advertising, PR, direct marketing, pay-per-click, SEO, trade shows and all other outreach. Did you meet your goals? How do you know?

At a minimum, you should be able to calculate your cost-per-lead, cost-per-sale and conversion ratios to determine if

your marketing mix is bringing home the bacon. Still hoping for a hole-in-one from that golf tournament you've been sponsoring for three years? There's no room for sacred cows when budgets are thin. If you're not getting value from these investments, send them to slaughter.

Contact points. Brochures, advertising, media releases, direct mail, Web, signage, business cards, vehicles, packaging, point of purchase, collateral, video, forms, billboards, invoices and statements, letterhead, mailing labels, on-hold messages, uniforms, blogs, online reviews and comments on social networking sites. Even the carpet in the lobby leaves an impression on your prospects, customers and other constituents. Don't overlook anything.

Your category. Are there new players? Consolidations? New technologies that are changing the way people interact in your category? Who is innovating? And how? Review what's happening and assess its impact on your business.

Your competitors. Do you know your competitors' positioning? Try this: place everything you can find from your company and your key competitors (ads, brochures, Web page printouts, etc.) on a conference table. Who is most professional? Most approachable? Who seems to understand the customer best?

Capture all this information in a grid and use it to guide your positioning.

Your customers. When was the last time you talked with the lifeblood of your company? Do you know:

- Where they go for information about your category?
- Which sources they trust the most? The least?
- How they would describe your company to a friend?
- Whether they're using your competitors for certain services?

Most importantly, ask customers, why did you choose us? They won't tell you what they'd share with a professional researcher. But if you can't swing the dollars for research, at least speak formally with your customers once a year. We've served over 500 clients in the last 10 years. We've yet to have a single one tell us they regretted talking with their customers.

Corporate and business positioning. Are you delivering key differentiation at every contact point? If team members are asked about your company at a party, would they describe you in a way that differentiates you from others in the category? For example, "We provide counsel to creative companies," instead of, "We're a law firm."

Internal communications. Brand-building won't get very far if people inside the company aren't living up to your brand promise (and maybe they don't know what it is). Employees make better decisions about using resources (including their own time) when they

know what the company is trying to accomplish, and they're more productive when they sense that they have a meaningful future with the firm. And, honest communications with staff quiets the rumor mill.

Marketing infrastructure.

Marketing is usually campaign-based, or seasonal. Yet marketing departments are often staffed with full-time employees expected to stay busy year-round and bring expertise to all marketing disciplines. Unless you're paying six-figure salaries, you won't get that kind of talent.

Make sure your team is playing to its strengths. There are plenty of qualified resources out there, including freelancers, specialty firms and contractors. If your marketing person doesn't have the experience to get the work done professionally, hire someone who can.

Marketing processes. Evaluate your systems, processes and procedures. Do you have a style guide? Do you maintain measurement processes? How do you manage your campaigns? If you aren't positive your approach is best-of-breed, it probably isn't.

The bottom line here is to better understand your strengths and weaknesses so you can make appropriate adjustments.

Step 2: Write or refine your Marketing Plan

It's astounding how many organizations are flying blind, reacting rather than planning. But the good news is that after reviewing your marketing results, contact points, category, competition, positioning and marketing infrastructure, you've laid the foundation for a solid, effective marketing plan.

There are a host of marketing plan templates, but we never use them. Never have. Never will. The problem is that most plans walk you through a series of steps that look good in business school but don't focus on the 20 percent of the plan that actually builds awareness and drives sales.

Here are the essential elements of a functional marketing plan, in tackling order:

Develop your positioning statement. Your statement should state clearly and simply:

- Who you are
- Who you are for
- How you are different
- Why that matters

Formulate your message strategies. The goal: motivate prospective customers (see diagram below). Don't make claims you can't support with strong, tangible evidence. And remember, to change behavior you first need to change the way a prospect thinks.

Develop marketing and contact strategies. These are big-picture ideas, such as, "Develop a viral campaign leveraging social networking Web sites." Your customers told you where they go for their information. Use that to guide which contact points and media to use. And if you're buying media, consider a professional media buyer. It's worth the investment.

Create an action plan. This is where you transform strategies into specific projects. Develop a schedule and a budget for creative development, production and implementation. Determine which internal resources should be used for which components. Find the best-fit resources you need to

get everything done, depending on the strategies you developed.

We are regularly asked, "What do companies in our category typically budget for marketing?" Our response is that what your competition spends is irrelevant. Your budget should be based upon your goals and objectives, not some arbitrary industry or category average.

Also, consider developing your plan in PowerPoint or Keynote. Because it can be shared more easily, it will help build consensus and support for your efforts.

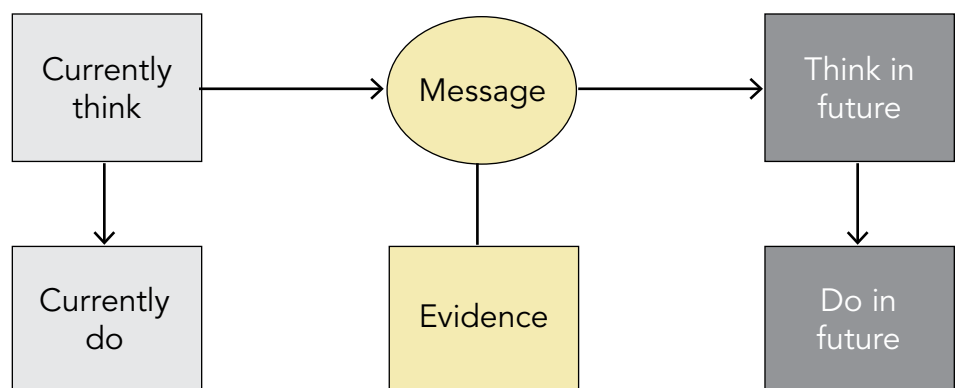
Step 3: Implement your plan, tracking results as you go

Now that you've planned your work—work your plan. This is the fun part! Depending upon how ambitious your plan is, allow several weeks or months to develop all the communications pieces. There's a lot of back-and-forth during creative development, copywriting, design, filming, editing, printing, coding and media placement.

In drafting this article, I asked my colleagues what they considered the most important element of good marketing. Ironically, planning wasn't No. 1. Most responses focused on the fact that companies need to *implement* their marketing plans. They need to get their marketing *done*.

In fact, the biggest challenge of implementing good marketing is logistical. Once you've determined the

Message strategy format



right resources (PR, advertising, direct marketing, Web, printers, designers, copywriters, etc.), you must place a similar priority on managing everyone to make sure things go smoothly.

Don't just track the results of your campaign. That's assumed. The results of your relationships and the quality of the process need to be constantly inventoried as well. Maybe the creative was good, but the creatives drove you nuts. Or deadlines seemed to slip. Or print quality wasn't what was expected. Keep track of what's worked and what hasn't. Give credit where credit is due, but also provide the feedback your partners need to serve you better. And if they fail you time and again, move on.

Once again, this part of your campaign should be *fun* as your ideas begin to blossom into something real. But depending upon the complexity of your campaign, it can be the most gut wrenching thing you've ever done (some companies choose to have us manage this).

Simple lesson here: Implement your plan faithfully and document *all* of your results.

Step 4: Apply lessons learned

Marketing is a process, not a project. If you've documented your results, they will illuminate next year's planning. Do more of what works and focus on making the subtle changes that matter: Send out the invitations two weeks sooner. Find a more responsive printer. Upgrade the computer network. Work with best-fit talent.

Of course, campaigns that bomb have value too—especially if you apply the hard lessons you learned. Think of it this way: When you know what doesn't work, you can fix it or scrap it. Just be sure to document everything. Lessons learned aren't worth much if they walk out the front door with a disgruntled employee.

Make 2007 the year you finally keep your marketing resolutions. Take the steps you need to improve your marketing, then go forth and conquer.

And have a happy and prosperous New Year!

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