



## Marketing Messages

**MARY CHARLESON***Are you really ready to advertise?*

Let's suppose you have some concerns about your business. Things seem to be running smoothly, but sales growth is flat. You know a good way to grow your customer base is to advertise. Consider this for a moment. For what it will cost you to place a full-page ad in the **Georgia Straight**, you could send an undergrad arts and science honours student to **UBC** for an entire year. (Approximately \$4,000) You could fund an entire 4 year degree at UBC for the cost of a full-page ad in Saturday's **Vancouver Sun**. Want to produce and buy a prime time television campaign for a 30 second commercial? Prepare to part with some serious cash. The point is, advertising is not cheap. Like a good education, it's a wise investment, which will reap rewards if done right. Choose the right media, reach the right target group, and deliver the right message and you'll strike gold. A poor message, or worse no real message, delivered in the wrong media missing your target audience is money squandered. But before you purchase advertising, you must assess your business and your marketing plan. Are you really ready to advertise?

Advertising types can dazzle you with a situations analysis, objectives, creative briefs, strategies and media plans, but it fundamentally boils down to this: are you doing anything worth bragging about? If you aren't, you don't have an advertising problem. You have a marketing problem. Don't spend a dime on advertising until you have your business in order. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- **Are you delivering compelling functional, emotional and financial value to your customers?** Your product or service must be functionally superior to your competitors. If your business creates a strong connection with the customer - making customers feel valued, good about themselves or happy that your business solved a problem for them, you have connected at an emotional level. You must also deliver the perception of good value by offering the best price, or by making them believe the price they paid is a fair exchange for a superior product or service. If you can't clearly define your functional, emotional and financial value to customers, you're not ready to advertise.
- **Are your target customer well understood?** You must know their demographic profile, their values and preferences. If you don't know who your target customers are, what they really value and what your compelling value is to them, you're not ready to advertise.
- **Can you honestly say you're really good at what you do?** Does your business differentiate itself from your competitors in a meaningful way? Do you always think of your customers first? Get good, then advertise. You must know and be able to identify to your customers what makes you different from your competitors. Every single pricing decision, display, design, and operational system must be designed with customer interaction top of mind. Why would you want to bring in new customers if they weren't going to have an excellent experience? You want them to love you, and spread the word. Which brings us to the next point...
- **Your most cost effective and powerful advertising is not purchased. It is earned.** The enthusiastic recommendation of satisfied customers is far more effective than any advertising campaign you can buy. With a plethora of the mundane at their doorstep, consumers are thirsty for a find, something worth seeking out, something that delivers a superior experience, unparalleled value, something worth bragging about. You want these customers to be recommending you! Bis Moreno, a restaurant on Hornby at Pacific, is a good example. With their unique 5 tasting dining menus, great food and service, just try getting a table any evening without a reservation. You can't. Good news spreads quickly. You want to achieve leverage with your customers. When the experience you deliver is so compelling that every new customer your advertising attracts enthusiastically recommends you to others, you have achieved leverage. Don't buy advertising until you know you've got leverage.
- **Does your planned advertising present you as the media or respected authorities view you?** Advertising is only effective if what you say about yourself is consistent with what others are saying about you. If you claim you give the best service or price, but they say you don't, your advertising will be largely wasted. You need to create a consistent and honest identity before you advertise.
- **And remember, customers aren't stupid, so don't lie.** If you aren't the cheapest, the best, the largest, the quickest, the most exclusive, or the most preferred, don't tell them you are! Air Canada needn't tell us about good customer service. They should show us. Unless you can stake a genuine claim in this area, avoid false statements. You'll risk losing leverage with customers forever once they've had an experience that doesn't substantiate your claim.

So, are you really ready to spend big money on advertising, or do you have some work to do first? Advertising is a good investment, but choose to do it wisely.

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