

A Common Sense Approach To Your Brand Message - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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We struggle to communicate our Brand Message, as we attempt to influence, often times not adhering to a very basic template. Essentially, we have a product or service we represent, and it must be delivered to a targeted audience.

We need to craft a message about our product or service, and we need to select a medium to carry that message. A very straightforward template, one would think. However, each aspect of this communication template is interrelated and must be integrated for the maximum effect.

The Process begins with our fully understanding what we wish to communicate - a concise, explicit, honest statement of what our product or service is. We have taken time to determine the qualities we believe will describe what we are sharing with our various audiences. Typically, this will include what specifically the product or service is, what it will do and the benefits to those in 'need'. As we define, we must have answered each and every question which can be misconstrued by the audience we wish to reach and impact. If we have not practiced due diligence in this exercise, we will be eviscerated. Do not go naked into that good night with bells and whistles.

Naturally, we have a full appreciation of the audience we wish to reach, we have done our homework. We have demographic information, tastes, history, spending patterns, education, behaviors and the like. We have used research, perhaps held surveys and Focus Groups. We know that our product or service will resonate with a specific audience. Obviously, the more we know about our audience, the better we can also define the specifics of our presentation.

In this Experience Age, authenticity, honesty and brevity are the key words for any message constructed. This is a USA Today audience - give them snapshots, the highlights, do not give them too much narrative or fluff, for you will be dismissed. Your message must have an attractive format, vocabulary which matches the audience, active words which denote some type of sensory response. Shape behavior with the images you create, but do not promise expectations which cannot be delivered. Generation X requires a very different content than the Baby Boomers.

The last step moves into context, where you choose your medium to relay the message to the audience you seek for your product or service. "The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan, meaning that the medium influences how the message is perceived. As stated by Wikipedia, the free Dictionary, McLuhan proposed that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role, not only by the content delivered over the medium but also by the characteristics of the medium itself.

This is a crucial decision, for the means you select will determine the cost of your campaign and the success. Such choices we have - the handbill under the window wiper of our cars, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, television, Blackberrys and the like. Each has value. The handbill for the local Pizza Parlor, radio for the commuter 'drive-time' audience, a thirty second spot on the Discovery Channel for the Ecologically minded, and your logo and Press Release on an e-commerce publication. If the radio plays jazz or rock, you are reaching different groups of Consumers. On television, different programs have different constituencies. Newspapers and magazines usually have very good market analysis but with a declining market share. The Internet is wide open. So much choice! Very tight budgets demand very prudent decisions, and several media venues/means are a better option than just one. Create the Buzz!

We try to keep it simple, identifying the Key Elements and continually circling to ensure we are on track. The world moves quickly, tastes and patterns change instantaneously, and the Consumer is King. We must learn to influence that marketplace and keep the basics in front of us. We do have the opportunity to transform rather than just merely convey.

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