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Marketing Is Everything

Sim Wong Hoo blew it.

In 2000 the Singapore entrepreneur came up with the idea that eventually became the iPod. He was approached several times by Apple's Steve Jobs to do a joint venture. Jobs was turned down, and Sim went his own way—creating half-baked in-house marketing materials and doing no brand advertising.

Jobs brought out the iPod and ate Sim's lunch; now Sim is suing for a patent infringement.

It seems inventors like to invent, but they operate on the better mousetrap theory—that buyers will beat a path to their door.

"Build it and they will come," was the refrain in Kevin Costner's "Field of Dreams."

"Build it and they will come is bullshit," said the late developer Willard Rouse, who built Boston's Faneuil Hall complex, Baltimore's inner harbor and changed the skyline of Philadelphia. "Build it, sell the hell out of it and they will come."

Quite simply, if you have a product or service, it's imperative to get a marketing professional on board early in the process.

The question: Do you sell the hell out it via direct marketing or brand advertising? Or both?

And how do you choose the agency?

General Advertising Agencies and Design Firms Can't Do Direct Marketing

And vice versa

By Robert C. Hacker

If you outsource, one of the most important decisions you'll make is hiring the right resources to help you. General agencies and design firms can't do direct marketing when return on investment (ROI) is the prime criterion for success. ROI means by-the-numbers program development, measurement and control.

Truth be told, general agencies and design firms don't want to be measured objectively—they prefer subjective judgment. And they're almost proud of their organizational anarchy, which works OK in advertising creative development, but can kill you in direct marketing program development and management.

Unless an agency thrives on tight control and objective measurement, it shouldn't play the direct marketing game at all. Most general agencies we run into will tell their clients, "Yeah, we do direct," even

if they don't know a good offer from a box of rocks.

On the other hand, most of the direct marketing agency people I know admit they couldn't do a brand campaign to save their lives. It should be the other way around. When an agency screws up a direct marketing campaign, it gets caught in a few days or weeks and there's nowhere to hide.

Bad advertising can run for years and nobody gets caught.

Integrated agencies can do an OK job, as long as the value of direct marketing and the people who do it are not denigrated by the advertising pointy-heads. You can check this out before you launch a program. Listen to the way they talk about direct in conversation, you'll often hear it referred to as a second-class citizen. That's not good.

Who does advertising creative and who does direct marketing creative? If it's the same people, they'll do one or the other poorly, usually direct. If there are two different groups, the further they are kept apart (different companies, divisions, floors or buildings) the better the work should be.

The culture chasm that exists between advertising and direct marketing creatives is rarely bridged. (For some reason, general advertising people think they rank higher on the food chain than direct marketers. Go figure! Most general agency folks can't prove their value to a client; all good direct marketers can. To the penny.)

Direct marketing agencies and vendors will typically run the most cost-efficient, highest ROI direct marketing programs. It's in their DNA. But I'd never let them do brand work. In fact, the better they are at direct, the worse they are at general advertising. Here's why:

- * Advertising people hate being held accountable for sales. Good direct marketing people insist on it.
- * Direct marketing is copy-centric. Advertising is more often driven by design.
- * The copy used to promote brand is company or product focused.

Direct marketing copy used to generate immediate response focuses on manipulating the mindset of the recipient. Isn't "brand," by definition, focused on the company and what it sells? People who can do one well often can't do the other. For example, I'm a great direct marketing writer. I couldn't write an award-winning TV campaign to save the life of my first-born.

I was once showing a piece of work to a brand new client. "Gawd, that thing is ugly," said the client.

"Thank you." I said, "We had to send it back to the design team three times to make it ugly enough to hit the response rate targets. Thanks for noticing—most clients miss it—I'll thank the team for you."

He was flabbergasted, to say the least. But he also approved the work.

Was the program ugly enough? You bet. We had to generate 3.3 percent to hit target. The program did 5.4 percent. From then on, he demanded that every program had to be "at least as ugly" as the first one we did."

It's amazing how good numbers can change people's attitudes about good vs. bad creative.

Direct marketing is offer driven. Direct marketing copy is argumentative and tries to get you to change behavior—now. But, if you don't like offers or know how to make a good offer, or get a kick out of manipulating people with words and pictures, you can't do good direct.

Advertising copy is evocative and tries to get you to change the way you think. It's hard to be evocative with offer driven copy. Writers who can do one well often can't do the other. It's not in their DNA.

Direct marketing design is "sales-y". Many advertising people would consider being called "sales-y" an insult. A proud, dyed-in-the-wool, no-jive, mighty-proud-to-say-it direct marketing designer would take it as a compliment.

You just can't get around the fact that their belief systems are 180 degrees out of kilter.

In short, advertising/design and direct marketing people come from two different worlds. They are driven by very different devils and get their kicks doing very different things.

If you need response, hire a resource that relishes generating high response and wants to be objectively measured and held accountable for results.

If you want to win awards, hire a general agency that needs a trip to Cannes to justify its worth.

Takeaway Points to Consider:

*If you're Steve Jobs—able to deal with creating product AND do brilliant marketing, it's probably a good idea to hire an agency anyway, because you won't have time to do everything well.

*When pitching potential clients, it's usually the high-powered agency president that glad-hands the prospects and does the razzle-dazzle presentation. Once the account is landed, the work is turned over to underlings.

*Before hiring on an agency, get to know the underlings.

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