

Beyond Media: New Channels Drive Results

By Jennifer Maxwell-Muir

Most potential clients who walk through our doors come to us because they want editorial coverage. We can't deny the power of a good media strategy.

But what do you do when the spotlight fades? How do you maintain efforts to increase awareness when you're not the new kid on the block anymore?

The good news is media is not, and shouldn't be, your only communication channel. Anyone who thinks so is selling short the potential of their brand, and not benefiting from the impact of an integrated campaign.

Results Beyond Media Coverage

Here are seven considerations for breaking out of the boundaries of traditional media relations to build strong customer relationships, drive trial and build brand awareness.

1. Online coverage drives direct traffic to your Web site that you can measure. So if you're looking for ROI beyond circulation figures, reach out to bloggers, the citizen journalists of our time. Put Web analytics in place so you can watch exactly what's driving visitors to your site.
2. Most surveys reveal consumers are much more likely to buy a product after they've had a chance to experience it. It's hard to smell, touch and feel when it's in black and white. Look for ways to bring your brand to life through sampling efforts that intersect with your product, such as when Gillette shared Venus razors at the beach and Tide's recent effort to share samples at Ann Taylor. Measure engagement by enticing samplers to visit your Web site and redeem coupons at their local retailer.
3. Ethically, journalists are not supposed to bring a bias to their work. It's not their job to be your cheerleader. Consumers, however, are a totally different story and are often willing to spread the word about your product and services if given the right tools and incentives. Just look at the power of current "house parties" in the presidential campaign. (The gift of gab can work against you too; nothing spreads more quickly than a product or service gone badly.)
4. Your biggest advertising vehicle may actually be your packaging. Is it working as hard as it can? Are you using it to share your values and company 'back story' about how the company began and why it matters today? Does it promote your Web site? Solicit feedback? If you can't change your box, can you sticker it?
5. Consumers, particularly in the LOHAS market are looking for authentic brands they can trust. [According to Advertising Age](#), in the 2008 Cone Cause Evolution Study, 26% of consumers expect companies to give more support to causes and nonprofits in an economic downturn, while 52% expect companies to maintain existing programs. Another 79% of consumers said if price and quality were similar, they would switch to a brand associated with a good cause.
6. Aligning with a cause or nonprofit is an interesting way to reach new customers. Often, your partner will help promote your product to their members and do whatever they can to help drive traffic to your site and use of your product. They see the more support you have, the more support you'll give.
7. Keep your employees happy. They're your ultimate ambassadors. Just look at the culture [Zappos](#) has built. The company changed the way shoes are sold online by investing in training and culture fit. These front line employees helped the company earn a stellar reputation for customer service.

The PR game has changed, but too many people are still following the old rules. Look beyond traditional media to drive brand awareness. Go micro instead of macro.

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