

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S WHAT PEOPLE HEAR



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Following on from the five P's of marketing, Irving Stackpole and Elizabeth Ziemba explore how to make your promotional materials as effective as possible.

In last month's edition, the five P's of marketing – **product, price, place, position and promotion** – were introduced as variables that managers must thoroughly understand to

define market and identify the features that appeal to customers. Building on the marketing basics, this month we explore marketing messages as part of promotion that

create unique positioning and differentiating factors to send a clear message about your product to the right audience.

Effective marketing requires that you define your product

accurately, price it appropriately for its place and position before you can begin to promote your business. This information is essential for you to formulate your key message

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and two or three supporting themes. Once you have completed that groundwork, then you are ready to review existing, or design new, promotional materials to ensure a return on investment for your marketing budget.

In the health and social care sectors, effective marketing creates and delivers messages clearly and powerfully. Some messages have a positive

impact on the people's perceptions while others don't even make a dent. What makes some messages work and others not? What guidelines can you use so that your promotional materials stand out from your competition?

There are books available that can guide you in developing your promotional messages and materials. *Words That Work* and *What Sticks*

are excellent introductory texts for developing effective marketing messages. By synthesising the material in both books and applying them to the health and social care sectors, here are ten rules for creating messages that people will hear and remember when it comes time to buying services.

Keep it simple

Creating a simple message sounds easy but is very difficult in practice. Think of Nike's tag line, 'Just do it!' It's a simple sentence that propels us off the couch and into the world of activity. Known worldwide, Nike chose the right three words that would represent their brand and stick with audiences worldwide so that Nike trainers and sportswear are the brand of choice internationally.

Delivering care services is a complicated business. Professionals want to demonstrate competency by providing a lot of information but most of it is tuned out as information overload. Instead, deliver your key message with no more than three or four major themes using familiar words in short, definite sentences. Jargon is absolutely forbidden. Simple doesn't mean stupid so avoid language that is condescending.

Avis uses the line, 'We try harder' acknowledging their place in the market as the second largest car rental company and appeals to our desire to root for the underdog. It's implied that by Avis trying harder, we will have better service. Like Avis, the concept contained in your message should be easily grasped by people who don't know anything about your product yet leaves them wanting to know more.

Keep it brief

According to Shakespeare, 'Brevity is the soul of wit' and the heart of good marketing communications which is why

Nike and Avis have three word messages.

Instead of providing chunks of information, hold the explanations and create a feeling of reassurance, relief and confidence. PrimeCare's key message is 'Protecting people who care' evoking a sense of security for caring people while selling insurance for domiciliary care workers. Instead of talking about rates and actuarial tables, the concept conveyed by the message appeals to employers who want to protect their most valuable assets - their care workers.

Short messages also look better on the pages of your website, brochures and advertisements by leaving space for high visual impact. Fewer words leave room for photographs and other visuals such as your logo to support the mood your words create. Pages crammed with words are too dense and intimidating. Most people will not take the time to read them, wasting valuable promotional money.

Be credible

Marketing messages must be believable and designed to build confidence. What do you think about the tag line 'Surpassing all your care needs'? Does it over promise or generate trust? Will customers believe that you can truly provide services that will surpass all of their care needs? Be careful what you promise because once confidence is lost, customers will be sure to follow.

Consistency

Take your key message and utilise it in all your promotional materials because repetition and intensity build brand equity. Advertisers know that repetition works which is why the same commercials are played over and over and over during your favourite TV programmes.

Support your words with ►

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pictures that match the message and mood you are building with your audience. If the words and pictures do not match, you will create confusion and your message will be lost.

Do your brochures use words that promise individual care but show pictures of buildings? If so, you are sending a mixed message that undermines your marketing efforts. If you are selling care homes, then show pictures of buildings. If you are providing nursing care for individuals in their homes, then show people.

How does it sound?

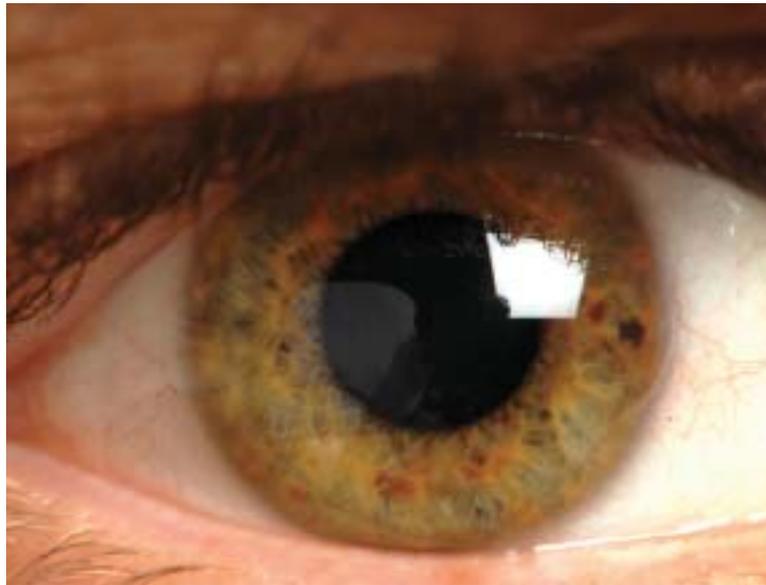
Even if words are not spoken out loud, our inner ear 'hears' the written word and sends messages to our brains about the words. Read your promotional materials out loud to yourself and others. Do the words flow or are they stiff and stilted?

Think of the Cadbury message, 'Glass and a half of full cream milk in every bar'. The soft and subtle alliteration relays the message that Cadbury chocolate is rich and creamy. Call to your audience in a voice that sounds right for you and your business.

Create aspiration

'It's better in the Bahamas.' Don't you aspire to have your toes wiggling in the warm Caribbean sand?

Create an 'aspirational' vision for your clients. Stand in the shoes of your audience and describe the state of mind where the person aspires to be. Describe the comfort, assurance and peace of mind that your customer will achieve by engaging your services and entrusting their relative to your care home.



Visualisation

Words paint a picture and a picture is worth a thousand words. Both language and images should contribute to your key message, supporting each other. The Balens Insurance Specialists provide coverage for health care professionals and use the simple and straightforward tag line, 'We care for the carers'. The colourful and intricate logo is an intriguing design of an apple tree firmly rooted into the ground with a winged staff that represents the medical profession entwined around the trunk. The message of security and good health is anchored, just like the tree, to a sense of wellbeing. Your message should contain the same synergy.

Question your audience

Market research confirms that information posed as a good question has longer staying power in people's minds than a declarative statement. Aim for stronger audience engagement by asking a question. The advertising campaign for the US National Milk Processing Board, asks 'Got milk?' not 'Get milk'. Ask a great question and create a lasting message

providing a solution to a particular issue or problem. Put yourself into the context of families making difficult decisions about caring for mum and dad. InteCare asks 'What if this was your mother?' showing that their business understands that adult children worry about parents being over-medicated. How can you convey your empathy for your clients' difficult decisions and worries?

Take your time

Developing an effective marketing message takes

time and skill with constant refining and honing of your materials. If it were easy to do, promotional materials would be much more effective in reaching the right audiences at the right time. Need some inspiration? Check out the 'Advertising Slogan Hall of Fame' to explore key messages that are at the heart of the best promotional campaigns. While we have focused on slogans, remember that they are just the central message that should be the keystone of all your promotional materials.

Be novel

Offer something new or create a new way of describing your services. The challenge is to take an old idea like care homes and put a novel spin on it to get your audience to say 'Wow, I never thought of it that way!'

Think about an approach like 'What will mum do with her new friends?' as a way of featuring activities and friendships as among the benefits to living at a care home. Avoid tired words like 'quality', 'safety' and 'staff'. These words are used so often that they have lost their meaning and go 'unheard' by prospective customers who expect quality care by well trained staff in a safe environment. If 'Got milk?' can make milk new and exciting, then look for innovative ways to refresh your marketing message.

Keep in context

Demonstrate your understanding of how your product fits into the lives of your target audience by

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Take a few minutes to find an advertisement or brochure that catches your eye and stays with you long after you put it away. Analyse how these concepts were applied to that effective piece of marketing and then do the same for one of your own. Utilising these ten rules of marketing will guide you to refined messages that will rise above the clutter for people to hear and to select your services. CMM

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Words That Work by Dr. Frank Luntz, Hyperion, New York, 2007
What Sticks by Rex Briggs and Greg Stuart, Kaplan Publishing, Chicago, IL, 2006
Advertising Slogan Hall of Fame <http://www.adslogans.co.uk/hof/>