

OP-ED PR is evolving into an ad strategy

Get a customer. Keep a customer. Business functions best when these two goals are met. And it's getting harder to do. At some point consumers make a decision to add a brand to their "accepted purchase menu." If we push this thought further, it means that somewhere along the line an impression is made – a positive one that sticks. Along with the stickiness comes satisfaction with use, and the circle continues until a better idea arrives to sweep the consumer into a new romance.

Getting a grip on the consumer isn't easy. A visceral connection must occur. Despite all the attention now invested in articles about the sea change in advertising effectiveness – otherwise known as the dilution of grip – many brands still pour the majority of their missionary spending into paid media. Marketers continue to love the tangible process of mixing words, design and moviemaking – the happy intersection of art plus science that commingles entertainment and salesmanship in a compelling elixir that surely will cajole the consumer into buying.

What if the consumer just isn't listening? The pathway into the brain is changing. And now PR should become an advertising strategy. How can this be? It's not paid for – it's editorial or at

least not transactional. Precisely. Authentic, credible forms of communication are, by definition, organic and earned. It is in this form of honest outreach that consumers are found listening. In a venue of earned communication they allow themselves for a brief moment to pay attention and listen to something new.

PR is evolving, too. What was once deemed solely the province of publicity is expanding into a broader definition of content

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development, thus helping create multiple brand touch points that feel genuine and respectful to the consumer. Launching word-of-mouth. Product seeding. Brand-delivered experiences that play to the self-interest (and avocations) of the desired customer. However it is defined, earned media is where connecting often occurs.

This means the PR team, the brand team, and the ad team need to become one team. It also

means that PR can no longer be thought of as an ancillary layer – another smallish piece of the outreach pie that adds impressions at lower cost to the media effort. PR is actually the linchpin to credibility and therefore must be integral to the launch strategy.

Advertising rewards consumers for their decisions, builds awareness, and develops an acceptance that moves new ideas from early adopters to the mainstream.

What brands also want is fidelity. But the marketplace around us is evolving at an alarming pace.

Unless the fires of brand passion are constantly stoked, consumers begin "looking" – and before long it's time to trade up to a new, more exciting relationship. This flirtatious behavior is due to the efforts of smart, nimble marketers who constantly innovate and stretch, seeking to create better product ideas that have a chance to resonate successfully. There is no room, no option except to be remarkable, functionally superior, constantly innovating, and re-thinking. In effect, brands must invest in the dating rituals long after the "marriage."

To get and keep a customer, it's time to anoint PR as an advertising strategy – in marketing thinking, planning, and spending. ■

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