

Marketing pragmatism in a recession: Why doing less of the same won't work

In many ways those 'cup-half-full' marketers, with their irrepressible zest for life, are right; a recession is an opportunity for the fleet of foot, so let's get on with it - keep spending. However, as a senior executive in the midst of a recession, you baulk at incurring the cost of even the most promising of campaigns when the threat of redundancy hangs heavy over so many good employees.

So, if you must, then cut the marketing budget,..... and dare to go one step further. Enforce a restriction on how your marketers communicate with your markets, particularly regarding which communication tools & techniques they employ.

You see, there is a tendency amongst marketers to try to continue as before, even as the funding dries up. Too often, their response to a funding crisis is to simply do a little bit less of everything – 3 newsletters instead of 4, a promotion every 4 months instead of bi-monthly, 50,000 leaflets instead of 75,000 – and so it goes on. Just do a little bit less of the same, trim the cost base and treat the recession as an exercise in budgeting rather than a genuine marketing challenge.

Tempting though this approach may be, for the majority of service sector businesses it is the wrong thing to do and is unlikely to work. Yes, operational marketers are correct in that a recession certainly casts up opportunities. However, inch deep, mile wide marketing simply won't pass muster in the B2B services sector, where depth of relationship holds such sway. Enforcing a limitation on marketing techniques forces choice and ensures target focus in the short-term, whilst freeing-up time to embrace change and prepare to do smarter marketing in the future.

What is 'smarter' marketing? Well, you could start by getting out of the current marketing rut – doing all those things you've always done – and begin to consider **all** of the options. You can rest assured that, whether it's online, offline, hardcopy, softcopy, campaign-driven, event-driven or relationship-driven, something will have changed in the world of marketing that has the potential to help your business cut costs and, more importantly, reach new markets in the future.

Secondly, take the opportunity which the recession has thrown up to look afresh at your organisation's competences and services, and how you attract the market. Market dynamics evolve continuously, and no more so than as the result of the fall-out from a recession. Plan now, and be prepared for when the up-turn comes.

Take my word for it – over time, simply doing less of the same will have a disproportionately negative effect on the impact of your market messaging, until you reach the logical conclusion – expensive and ineffectual marketing. Meantime, a post-recession brave new world is already beginning to form. Grasp that opportunity and prepare now to be a player.

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