

# Developing a Communications Campaign

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Any communications campaign must have clear, measurable objectives. This is true whether the campaign is designed to communicate product benefits or to support an event. In order to achieve these objectives, a campaign requires careful planning. There are eight main stages to consider, from defining the target market to setting a budget and schedule.

## What You Need to Know

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### Does my business really need to engage in an advertising campaign?

Often the term “advertising campaign” is used when the more general term “communications campaign” is more appropriate. Typically, *advertising* refers to purchased space or time in media such as newspapers or radio. On the other hand, a variety of *communications* tools—such as direct mail, sales promotions, exhibitions, etc.—can be used in a campaign to support your message.

Before undertaking a communications campaign, make sure that you have chosen the right solution to the problem you are addressing. For example, finding new customers or prospects may best be accomplished by an advertising or direct mail campaign, but converting information-seekers into customers may be better handled by sales representatives in person.

### Is the client or the advertising agency responsible for planning a campaign?

Actually, both parties are. If they work well together, it’s much more likely that the campaign will be a successful one. The client sets the overall marketing objectives and the specific communications campaign objectives. The advertising agency develops a strategy based on those objectives, but may also provide useful feedback on the campaign objectives. The appropriate timing of a campaign will be determined by the client’s product and marketing plans, together with practical considerations such as publication dates and lead times.

## Why is it necessary to plan in such detail?

To be successful, advertising and communications must meet specific measurable objectives. The objectives affect choice of media, creative strategy, overall budget, and lead times. Overlooking any of the necessary details will weaken the impact and effectiveness of the campaign.

## Should planning be applied to a creative process?

There is an assumption that creative work takes place in a vacuum—this, however, is rarely the case. Like any other marketing activity, creative work must be directed toward a specific and detailed set of objectives. The more information a creative team is given, the more it can focus and direct its work.

## What to Do

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### Set Objectives

Advertising campaigns require clear objectives. Determine the communications objective and how it contributes to the wider marketing objectives. For example, you may strive to raise product awareness within a new region, in order to enable a specific increase in sales volume.

To insure a cost-effective campaign that delivers results, advertising objectives should be translated into precise, measurable targets. For example:

- generate 5,000 prospects and convert 3.5% of them;
- reach 100 new decision makers within Fortune 1000 companies and convey an understanding of your product's business benefits;
- raise awareness within 15% of a competitor's customer base.

### Define the Target Market

At whom is your campaign aimed? An understanding of the audience will influence the media selection and the creative treatment. To define the target market of a particular region, consider questions like these:

- Who buys your type of product or service?
- Who influences the purchasing decision?

- In business buying, who are the important decision makers?
- Who do you need to reach with your message—the actual buyers or those who influence the purchasing decision?
- How many customers currently buy your product or service and what is your market share?
- How many potential buyers are there?
- Which prospects do you want to reach with the campaign, and where are they located?
- What are the characteristics of these people (for example, age, sex, income, job title), and what are their primary considerations in choosing a brand or a supplier?
- What does research tell you about their attitudes toward your company and/or your products?
- How do they currently receive information about your products or services?
- What is the role of advertising in reaching the target audience?

## Select Media

Once you have defined the audience for an advertising campaign, careful selection of the right media is a critical next step. There are four important factors to consider in selecting campaign media:

- how closely your target audience fits the audience profile of the medium;
- the comparative costs of reaching the target audience through different media;
- the frequency of the medium, and whether it matches the timing of your campaign;
- the creative opportunities of the medium for the communication of your message.

## Plan Campaign Timing

As they say, timing is everything. When should your campaign run? You must consider a number of factors in relation to the purchasing pattern of your product or service:

- When do your customers make their buying decisions?
- Do you know when your customers hold product/purchasing review meetings?
- If you are launching a new product, when will the product be available?
- With which other marketing activities does your advertising campaign have to integrate—for example, an exhibition, direct marketing campaign, or product launch?
- What kind of campaign follow-up will be required, and when will you be prepared to perform it?

You also have to take into account production and media lead times:

- What is the next available publication or broadcasting date?
- How long will it take to produce the advertisement?
- Can you meet required submission and production deadlines?

## Decide Frequency

Advertising messages raise levels of awareness each time they are communicated. They also move individuals further along the decision-making process, and can serve to maintain contact during an extended process. Campaigns reinforce the impact of the message by repetition, and also provide an opportunity to communicate multiple or complex messages about the company or the product range.

Advertising frequency is often inherent in the type of media. For example, print ads in some publications are released quarterly, radio or television commercials can be broadcast many times during the same day, and Internet-based ads can appear thousands of times in a period of hours. Factors that contribute to the optimal frequency of an advertisement include:

- frequency of media publication or broadcast;
- available advertising budget;
- the behavior of consumers or buyers (for example, if a buying decision is made only annually, then timing may be more crucial than frequency).

## Prepare Comprehensive Creative Brief

To achieve optimal results, you must develop a comprehensive creative brief. This topic is covered in detail in another passage, but the main elements include:

- background information, including supporting activities—telemarketing, tie-in promotions, etc.;
- the core message and any offer being extended—an opportunity to sample or buy, further information, a sales visit, an incentive, or a discount;
- campaign objectives, including the planned response—is the prospect expected to contact the company, place an order, expect a phone call, or simply absorb the information?;
- relevant or supporting research—survey results, competitive analysis, etc.;
- competitive information—who the competitors are, how they are perceived;
- product information—key benefits, what is new, why the benefits are important;
- description and main concerns of the target audience—why they buy, what they consider, how they view different products and suppliers;

- the target media—size and mechanical details.

## Develop the Response Mechanism

Action is a critical ingredient of any advertising campaign and it is essential that you make it easy for your audience to respond. First, decide the action you wish them to take as result of your campaign. Examples include:

- requesting further information;
- visiting your Web site;
- visiting a retail outlet;
- arranging a meeting;
- placing an order.

Review the cost, convenience, and practicality—for you as well as your target customer—of various response options, including telephone, mail, fax, e-mail, and Web site.

## Set a Budget

There are various costs associated with an advertising campaign and you must plan a careful budget to accommodate them. A campaign budget will include direct, indirect, and variable costs. *Direct costs* include the production costs of advertisements—such as design, writing and production, and media costs. *Indirect costs* can include of the cost of activities such as setting up response handling (either by internal resources or an external supplier), or planning and managing the campaign. *Variable costs* will fluctuate with your response rate. Examples might include the expense for handling campaign response (800 number or telephone operator costs, postage, etc.); meeting the response (supplying and distributing the material that is requested); and servicing the response (sales or telemarketing costs for dealing with the potential volume of new business). If your anticipated budget exceeds available funds, reconcile this issue before undertaking the campaign.

## Set Schedules

Create a realistic schedule. Assess the time required for each element of the campaign, and communicate clear deadlines for specific milestones. Track the progress of these milestones closely and promptly address any schedule slips.

## What to Avoid

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### **You Don't Have Clear Targets**

Without a clear picture of your target audience, an advertising campaign can be a wasteful endeavor. Always aim for the best match between your ideal customers and the campaign audience—subject, of course, to your budgetary constraints.

### **You Don't Integrate Advertising with Other Marketing Activities**

Advertising must be integrated with other related marketing tasks. An untrained or absent sales force, for example, can squander the contribution of a successful advertising campaign that yields a large number of sales leads.

### **You Don't Have Enough Funding**

Trying to achieve advertising objectives without committing a sufficient budget will compromise the entire purpose of the campaign. Poor decisions made during budget trade-offs can result in advertisements which appear too infrequently to have impact or fail due to poor production quality, among other pitfalls.

## Where to Learn More

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### **Book:**

Steel, Jon. Truth, Lies, and Advertising: The Art of Account Planning. New York: Wiley, 1998.

### **Web Site:**

The American Advertising Federation: [www.aaf.org](http://www.aaf.org)