



Does Your Advertising Deliver the Perfect Pitch?

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ADVERTISING IS ALL ABOUT CONNECTING with customers. Words, images and how they are delivered mean something—and in the hands of the experts—the right message can translate into new business and a stronger brand identity. To assess what makes a good ad, how a branding campaign can work in niche markets, and what can be done to use all of the mediums available today, *COMMERCE* magazine asked the leaders of key advertising/communications firms for their thoughts on how to turn marketing collateral into revenue for the bottom line.

The following advertising executives participated in this special report: Success Communications Group Executive Vice President Michael G. Cherenson, APR; Creative Marketing Alliance President and CEO Jeffrey Barnhart; The David Henry Agency President & Chief Communications Officer David Fink; Princeton Communications Group CEO Lawrence Krampf; Linett & Harrison CEO, Creative Director, Chairman Caryl Linett; The Marcus Group, Inc. President & CEO Alan C. Marcus; Oxford Communications President John Martorana; Sigma Group President/Partner Shannon Morris; Grafica Group President and CEO Debra Taeschler; and The CBK Group Partner/Creative Director Bill Troncone.

Michael G. Cherenson, APR



"More than ever, authenticity is crucial, as consumers are better informed and more skeptical—which means ads must be beyond reproach."
—Success Communications Group Executive Vice President Michael G. Cherenson, APR

Jeffrey Barnhart



"When you've been cut to just a couple of chances to reach your audience through print, you better make sure it's eye-catching, makes an impression and really states who the company is."
—Creative Marketing Alliance President and CEO Jeffrey Barnhart

Q. How can a company establish a brand in niche markets? What are the elements of a successful branding campaign?

CHERENSON: Today, thanks to the rise of such social media as blogs, Facebook and YouTube, there is greater opportunity than ever before to access and leverage niche markets. In fact, the phrase "Long Tail" describes the niche strategy that involves selling a large number of unique items in relatively small quantities. Chris Anderson of *Wired* magazine, who coined the term, called it "The shattering of the mainstream into a zillion different cultural shards." Depending on the market, social media could supplant or support traditional marketing strategies. While there is greater access and opportunity, brands still need to deliver on their promise, exceed expectations, communicate effectively and consistently, and build a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with their markets. Now, more than ever, trust and authenticity are essential. Traditional methods certainly continue playing an important role in the marketing mix, but brands would be wise to consider how social media provides the opportunity to listen, talk to and energize niche markets.

BARNHART: The advertising, marketing and public relations industries are all currently at a turning point where agencies must rethink how they reach their target audiences. It is now imperative that agencies consider the technologies that their niche markets are using, such as podcasting, and design a strategy where these new media work together to complement traditional print, radio and television advertisements. This often takes more strategic planning as to how a company or product wants to be perceived and how brand messages will change to resonate with different types of audiences. The bottom line is that a branding campaign is only successful if you think of reaching your target audience in terms of quality, not quantity.

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David Fink



"A good print advertisement serves its strategic intent; is less copy-heavy than in times past; quickly delivers a message to its intended audience; and engages the reader." —*The David Henry Agency President & Chief Communications Officer David Fink*

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FINK: As a brand, you need to act like a politician and get your vote out. Tell people who you are, what you stand for and what you can do for them. Establish credibility and tell them why you are unique—especially when there are well-known companies providing your product or service in your prospective markets. Establish a platform for your marketing efforts that specifically addresses the needs and wishes of the niche community and how you will fulfill those needs. Retain some key industry people to be your “cheerleaders” (those who already cast a large shadow: consultants, leading manufacturers, media, others). Announce your ‘ticket’ by executing a comprehensive marketing/PR/ media plan that not only makes a splash but also sets the stage for a long-term sustained campaign. Having the right offer with the right story and the right people supporting you is a terrific foundation for capturing the lion’s share of a vertical market.

Lawrence Krampf



"Keep the communication simple. Keep an open mind. Don't clutter or throw everything about the product into the ad." —*Princeton Communications Group CEO Lawrence Krampf*

KRAMPF: These days, to create a successful brand in a niche market, there are certain fundamental decisions that need to be made up front. Having a deep understanding of your target audience and how your product will satisfy their need is perhaps the most important aspect of any new branding effort. Having a clear position that you can own relevant to the competition, and the confidence that your product can deliver on its promise are also key decision factors. Then you must set realistic objectives such as how fast you want to grow, what share of market you want to achieve over the next three years, and develop a budget that you feel will accomplish your goals. The next phase is to implement the strategy, creative messaging and developing a media mix that touches the target audience in as many ways as possible over and over and over.

LINETT: The key is finding the niche within the niche market that reflects the unique aspects of the company’s product/service as well as the company’s DNA. It doesn’t matter if it’s a consumer or a B2B client; the same principles apply. The visual and verbal tone speaks volumes about the company’s brand; implicit messaging is every bit as critical as the explicit. There should be a single-minded focus so that the branding is unequivocal and powerful. A strong positioning line is important. Solid strategic thinking is essential not only in developing the creative, but also in selecting the right media vehicles,

from broadcast to print to Internet, so that every dollar hits the right audience with the right message—one that will compel, resonate, and motivate. Above all, everyone at the company has to live and breathe the brand; everything must deliver the brand promise and personality every time the customer comes in contact with the company or its product/service.

MARCUS: Differentiation is key. To establish your brand you must find what makes it unique and better than your competition. A successful branding campaign takes commitment. Brands aren’t built overnight; it takes time, work and focus to keep your brand name in front of your target audience. Knowing how and where to reach your audience is essential. Casting too large of a net can result in low impact and awareness. It’s easier to make a big impact to a small key audience than to make a big impact on several different audiences at once. Choose your mediums carefully. For example, short, messaging with visual appeal is ideal for outdoor and online ads. Branding campaigns should be short and simple. Focus on one brand attribute at a time. If you have three or four messages, consider a series of ads. This will give your campaign the legs it needs to maintain momentum.

Caryl Linett



"A good ad has to draw in the reader and not waste his or her time but rather inform quickly while entertaining." —*Linett & Harrison CEO, Creative Director, Chairman Caryl Linett*

MARTORANA: Communicating effectively to a niche market is based wholly on understanding the culture of that specialized group. We start with questions. What makes this group “niche?” What inspires them? What challenges them? Who are their heroes and why? How do they live their days? When you get to the essence of that culture and truly understand who they are as humans, what they think and feel, where they live their lives, you can then create for them and compel them to act. They will believe in your brand because you understand them and reflect who they are in message and medium.

MORRIS: When communicating to niche markets, it’s strategically important to understand the consideration, trial and purchasing dynamics of your audience specific to those markets. This is a critical first step to establishing a strong, meaningful and resonating brand message. A brand that is successful will deploy a well-integrated and consistent marketing mix that resonates at all touch points—and that establishes credibility and validity relevant to niche markets. Providing communication that “speaks their language” that is delivered in a way that is relevant to a “day in their life” goes very far. For niche markets, consider deploying relevant traditional, non-traditional, emerging and social media applications to gain awareness. Consider cultivating relationships with cus-

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Alan C. Marcus



"Ads are expensive, so it's natural to want to squeeze a lot into the space. But it is important to fight that urge."
—Marcus Group, Inc. President & CEO Alan C. Marcus

John Martorana



"A good print ad is art. Today, the message must be clear, simple and graphic. We live in a world of images."
—Oxford Communications President John Martorana

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tomers and potential customers with programs that establish a thought leadership point of view such as a marketing e-mail offering opt-in for additional valuable insights and information.

TAESCHLER: The power of a brand in any market—broad or niche—is driven by relevance. Brands that wish to connect with a niche market must first understand how their offering fits into the everyday life of the target audience. This insight will help build a foundation for the development of products and communications that are specifically tailored to that audience. In doing this, the brand will ensure that all touchpoints with the consumer—from product to communications—are tailored to drive a deeper emotional connection with the niche market. A good branding campaign communicates the core values of the brand in a meaningful way, avoiding abstraction and connecting with consumers through imagery and language that is compelling and clear. It also provides an appropriate foundation for the communication of more specific products and services.

TRONCONE: A business that focuses on a niche market is addressing a need for a product or service that is not currently being offered. In order to establish a niche brand, a company must target a narrowly defined, growing customer base in a specialized market segment where there is little to no competition. The branding campaign must communicate the benefits of the specialized product, reach a highly targeted and identifiable market segment and build brand loyalty by fulfilling specific consumer needs. The use of "online niche marketing" which affords demographic, geographic, contextual and behavioral targeting has opened many avenues for delivering exact messages to specific niches. Our agency recently launched a successful campaign for a niche product that reduces hot flashes in menopausal women. The effort included a highly targeted Web site, an on-line video effort featuring women within the defined niche market, customized e-mail blasts and print ads.

Q. *An effective print ad of today may not have worked in the past. What are the qualities of a good print ad? What are a few do's and don'ts?*

CHERENSON: Call it information overload, attention crash or attention scarcity, the bottom line is that people are inundated—overwhelmed—with information and messages. Effective messaging is simple, visual, creative and logical. Ads that meet these criteria will be much

Shannon Morris



"Great print tells a story on a single page. It speaks to the reader in a definitive voice."
—Sigma Group President/Partner Shannon Morris

more effective. The simpler the message, the more people you will reach. Thanks to the Web, ads no longer have to tell the whole story, but can simply start the conversation. More than ever, authenticity is crucial, as consumers

BARNHART: Many companies are cutting their advertising budgets and one of the first areas to go is print. When you've been cut to just a couple of chances to reach your audience through print, you better make sure it's eye-catching, makes an impression and really states who the company is. Today, it's often just a single image with very little copy that is designed to capture what makes a company different from their competitors, instead of the busier ads we were seeing many years ago. While it of course depends on the client's goals, don't be afraid to make bold statements that leave the audience wanting to know more. Do make sure you drive the target to the company's website to help satisfy that curiosity.

FINK: Unlike years ago, print advertising today is only one component of a marketing plan across multiple media. A good print advertisement serves its strategic intent; is less copy-heavy than in times past; quickly delivers a message to its intended audience; and engages the reader. Great advertising motivates the reader to take action. What is it that you want the reader to do? The answer should be aligned with your overall business and marketing objectives. Do not fall into the trap of using the same language, imagery and promotions as your competitors. How can you expect your audience to differentiate between you and your competitors unless you tell them how/why you are different? Do challenge yourself by asking: "What are the most important things to this audience?" Use print advertising to demonstrate how your product or service has meaning in their lives.

KRAMPF: Execute a well-thought-out strategy, but allow yourself to really think beyond the typical execution. Keep the communication simple. Keep an open mind. Don't clutter or throw everything about the product into the ad. You'll end up pleasing no one. Always make sure the benefit comes through loud and clear in a uniquely different way. Be smart. Be fresh. Be clever, but not crazy. The best ads are the ones that clearly

LINETT: Every aspect of the creative has to break through with a compelling message that is relevant to the needs of our audience. There is a flood of clutter out

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Debra Taeschler



"A good print ad understands its limitations, and works within them. First and foremost, it has stopping power." —Grafica Group President and CEO Debra Taeschler

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there, competing for people's time. Online is a main source of information. There's no substitute, however, for engaging print. It's a unique experience with a powerful emotional appeal. A good ad has to draw in the reader and not waste his or her time but rather inform quickly while entertaining. It has to personalize the message and pay off for the reader by providing important benefits. Do make it worth the reader's time. Don't be cute for cuteness' sake. Don't talk down (or up). Do use simple, straightforward language. Never use jargon. Do be relevant. And do respect the reader's intelligence.

MARCUS: Advertising is everywhere, so simplicity is key. Short, simple messages are more memorable. Ads are expensive, so it's natural to want to squeeze a lot into the space. But it is important to fight that urge. Trying to say everything dilutes your message and often results in readers retaining nothing. A great ad makes you interested enough to take the next step—call, buy or click. Don't...pack too much into the ad. A little white space goes a long way. Empty space on a cluttered page draws readers and sets you apart from other ads. Promise more information and send them to a Web page with the exact same information. Do... keep it simple. Remember, most readers scan so an ad has to get their attention and stop them from turning the page. Give them a reason to call. Including a special offer or incentive can encourage timely responses.

MARTORANA: A good print ad is art. Today, the message must be clear, simple and graphic. We live in a world of images. As screens multiply in our lives with iPhones, BlackBerrys, laptops, iPods, computers at home, computers at work, TVs in every room, etc., we are being conditioned to think in images, to make decisions based on images. Print advertising is taking on visual and textual cues from the video world. One compelling absolute that evolved is the need to tie print into interactive campaigning. When a consumer is interested in the product, they want more information immediately. They no longer wait until the weekend to go to the department store to check out the product they see in a magazine—they go online to get a deeper understanding. They begin to participate in the brand even before holding it in their hands. Print is still an effective medium in certain categories when done right. Oxford has a significant client base in the fashion industry, one of the most print-addicted cultures, where the fashion magazine is its cultural bible. Here we see the print creative taking on artistic qualities that emulate the looks walking the runway with a clear, simplistic drive to

the Web site, where the world comes to life visually with images, video, consumer content generation, expert features and deep brand stories.

MORRIS: Advertising is all about breaking through—it's about the right message and the right visual coupled with the right media mix. They must work hand in hand. Today's consumer, even in a B2B space, is bombarded with advertising—online, at home, in the car, on the plane, on the radio, even in the elevator. Advertisers have to break through. Great print tells a story on a single page. It speaks to the reader in a definitive voice. Since times change and the consumer's media savvy changes, so do our approaches in print. Great print is a quick punch in the face. It goes "boom!" when you read it. Do...be relevant. Have a clear focus to your message, and have a strategy—even if it's a one-off. With this foundation, you can be as creative as you need to be, but still be engaging. Do...exploit a truth about your product. Do...try to tell your story with as few elements—visuals, copy or logos—as possible. The best print ideas need little window dressing. Don't...be creative for creativity's sake. Don't...try to tell more than one story in one ad. If need be, divide your messages among multiple executions. Don't...approach print with a weak or old strategy. The ad will follow suit.

TAESCHLER: A good print ad understands its limitations, and works within them. First and foremost, it has stopping power. It understands the environment it's in, and is created in a way to break through, or connect, with the reader through the presentation of an idea quickly and compellingly. Once the reader's been captured, a good print ad doesn't badger, but simply presents the offering and gives the interested consumer a place to find the product or get more information. Good print ads reflect an understanding of the reader's mindset, and the time they have to absorb the ad. Bad print ads seem to view the reader as a captive audience, are not singular in their message, and contain far too much information. Instead of an approach that invites the reader in, they seem to be designed with a shoe-horn.

TRONCONE: Today's consumers see hundreds of advertising messages a day. So the most important qualities of a print ad are to engage, deliver a clear message and stay true to your brand. Some great print ads have relied on a strong visual with little or no copy, like Apple for instance. Others utilize a copy heavy approach to get their message across. While there are no simple formulas for creating effective print advertising, there are a few things you should avoid. For one, try to let your headline or visual do most of the communicating. If your visual can tell most of the story, don't repeat that same message in the headline. If your headline is strong, the visual should support, but not repeat your message. Avoid ads that are boring, not true or have no strong idea. ■

Bill Tronccone



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