

Business Marketing Face to Face

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The Theory and Practice of B2B Marketing

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

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Principles of Business Marketing Communications

Overview

The main aim of this chapter, and the next, is to develop an understanding of the principles and characteristics of marketing communications. From an exploration of its role and tasks, the chapter considers some of the strategic issues and explores marketing communications strategy from a business audience perspective. A framework for the development of marketing communication plans follows.

B2B branding and integrated marketing communications are explored before examining marketing channel-based communications. If channels are to operate successfully and inter-firm relationships are to be developed for the benefit of all channel members, then sound trade channel communications are crucial. The chapter concludes with an examination of relationship-based marketing communication, and in particular, the nature, role and dynamics associated with client/agency based relationships.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this chapter is to explore issues concerning the role and characteristics of business marketing communications.

The objectives of this chapter are to enable readers to:

- 1 Explain the role and tasks of business-to-business marketing communications.
- 2 Examine the nature of strategy and planning in business marketing communications.
- 3 Consider issues related to business-to-business branding.
- 4 Explain the core ideas and characteristics associated with integrated marketing communications.
- 5 Consider the nature of channel-based marketing communications.
- 6 Explore ways in which marketing communications might be used to develop business relationships.

A Slice of Life – Evolution or Revolution?

There are few better places to look for good examples of good marketing and brand communications than where they didn't exist previously. That's almost impossible to achieve of course, because every business starts to communicate in some form or other from the day of its incorporation. Some businesses, however, are better at it than others. Some are in fact required to be better at it than others. Service companies without a tangible 'product' to sell, for example, focus on their message very quickly. Companies in saturated or highly competitive marketplaces inevitably seek a point of differentiation in order to stand out from the crowd.

The trick is to recognise and accept, early in the development of any kind of business, that no one except those with a vested interest in the business really gives a shit about communications. Armed with that salutary thought, the requirement for a coherent brand strategy and a sustainable barrage of communications that constantly assault the ambivalent prospective customer base, becomes more obvious. Unfortunately, I spend more time listening to clients saying, "I wish we'd started this years ago," than I hear them say, "The very first thing I need to do is sort out is my marketing."

I worked with a recruitment company that had been slow to adopt marketing practices, but was nevertheless a success long before my involvement. The company had grown quickly to achieve annual revenues of over £50m and it had done so with almost no marketing investment at all. It was succeeding in a hugely competitive environment - recruitment was (and is) one of the industries everyone treats as a 'necessary evil'.

Recognising that to maintain continued and sustainable growth, the company needed to communicate more effectively, it approached me to help create a brand and communications strategy. I succeeded with the former, and probably failed with the latter.

Taking a company through the steps to releasing the brand is always formative. You never really 'create' a brand strategy – the brand is always there, the trick is to articulate it in a way that positively influences people's perceptions of it. Even the simplest tools can become the strongest assets. Helping the company to identify who it was talking to, what to say, why it was important and what made it different sounds easy, but never is. When it's done, however, those assets provide the building blocks for all further communications – now, and long into the future.

In the case of this brand, and indeed any brand, the requirement was threefold. Firstly, the company needed to understand what their customers wanted – which was predominantly the functional service of, 'find me a job,' or, 'find me a candidate for a job'. The customer didn't want a new best