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In a Down Economy, Turn to PR

by Teresa Todd

Notable trade publication, Brand Republic, recently likened public relations as the Cinderella of the marketing mix ‘working hard behind the scenes while her sisters – advertising and direct marketing – steal the limelight.’

Given today’s fragmented media space, it stands to reason that the digital age and today’s volcanic economy have changed the dynamics of communication and Cinderella is coming of age.

Advertising and direct marketing continue to be effective, as they should. But today’s economic landscape requires that they work hand in hand with PR. After all, advertising’s challenge is PR’s greatest strength. PR is all about telling stories – telling yours, listening to what others say, and relaying their story back to the organization.

If you have a great story, PR can help you get it told and retold over and over again.

PR, in its simplest terms, involves getting someone other than yourself to talk about you. It encompasses and includes the practices of traditional and new media, viral marketing, experiential, sampling, strategic alliances, endorsements, events, and more.

However, PR cannot always control how the story is told, only guide it. You can hope only good things are said about your company or brand, or you can join in the conversation.

Advertising, on the other hand, has full control over the message and presentation of information, but lacks the third party credibility that consumers trend toward when making purchase decisions.

The Future Laboratory recently found that 60 percent of consumers now turn to friends and family for advice and insights. Termed ‘friendpertise’, this word-of-mouth extends to media and websites, with journalists and bloggers becoming a vital source of trusted advice for consumers.

Consumer Confidence Slipping Away

I recently sat down with local photographer, Yoti Telio with Santa Clarita Photographic Studio, to discuss a new project. Telio offered his insight into two principles driving our current economic situation at the consumer level: fear and guilt.

Fear that one might lose their job, so reduced spending becomes a hedge against future happenings, and guilt that if someone does have the money, they don’t want to display spending in these uncertain times. I would offer a third scenario: the reality faced by a growing number of families who have lost their means of support.

It's a vicious cycle in that the best way to restart our nation's economic engine will be through renewed consumer spending, which leads to job creation.

In these dark days, companies should remember that PR, in conjunction with advertising and marketing, helps remind consumers why they love and trust brands. The worse thing a business can do is stop marketing altogether. Without marketing how will your customers know you are still in business?

An effective PR campaign is perhaps the most cost effective, powerful message tool a business can utilize and one that yields the highest return on investment.

It's this success that has led to PR's "midnight moment".

PR In Action

While anyone can claim to do PR, how do you find an agency with the capabilities and competencies necessary to advise clients on a range of issues, including media relations, community outreach, crisis management, internal communications, investor relations, digital PR and corporate social responsibility?

Advice or recommendations from colleagues and non-competing businesses can be a good source for contacts and referrals. Local trade and business groups are another useful source. The Advertising Professionals Association (ADPROS), an affiliate member of the American Advertising Federation (AAF), has a website with valuable information and a membership directory, which includes local advertising, design, web, public relations, photographers and other creative professionals.

The majority of ADPROS members listed on www.adprosla.com are located in the Santa Clarita Valley. Their work spans a multitude of projects for many high-profile local, regional and national accounts. Each year the organization participates in the ADDY Awards, the world's largest competition for those involved in advertising, graphic design and related creative fields.

Winners from this year's competition will be announced during a dinner event on March 15, 2009. The local ADDY competition presents a good opportunity for prospective clients to see first-hand the quality of an agency's creative and to meet senior personnel. Businesses are encouraged to attend. For more information or to RSVP for the dinner event, contact Will Sherwood, The Sherwood Group, at 661.287.0017.

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