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First measure the results for the past year

## Preparing your marketing plan for 2016? First measure the results for the past year

Posted on December 21st, 2015 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



Whooooooshhhh — the year has blown by at warp speed! Does it feel as if everything is more compressed and just moves faster to you, too?

Seems like just yesterday that I was analyzing the previous year's marketing activities and results while toiling over the marketing plan for 2015. And here I am once again, looking into the proverbial crystal ball and determining where to focus priorities for the coming year.

Do you and your team invest time every year in this critical process? Do you thoroughly analyze your results and measure them against your goals for the year to determine what worked — and what didn't?

In consulting over many years, I often find clients embarrassed — or worse, defensive — about marketing initiatives that failed miserably, and my response is always the same. Listen, it's a smart strategy to selectively test-market and try new things, initially on a small scale. I totally applaud and encourage innovation and practice it regularly in my business.

However, where marketers sometimes falter is when they launch too large and/or fail to closely monitor and measure the new campaign's results in real time. It's easy to scrap a small initiative or change the variables when it's clearly not working. However, it's a totally different scenario and outcome when you've dumped a ton of dough into an unproven medium or platform, then failed to monitor the results.

As Kenny Rogers so aptly reminds us, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away and know when to run." Amen, brother.

This begs another important consideration: Are you taking advantage of available technology and tools to help you organize and objectively measure your marketing results? Whatever you're looking to do or measure in the marketing sphere, there's bound to be a good app or tool for that.

If you need help navigating the vast mine of technology tools and options, reach out to other marketers and ask or conduct online searches and read reviews. But don't miss the point — you need to measure your ROI and to use the best tools to make it as efficient, effective and as easy as possible.

No matter how big or small your company, the CEO or president should hold marketing leadership fully accountable for performance. Whether it's a monthly, quarterly, biannual or — at a minimum — an annual review, marketing should be expected to provide a detailed performance evaluation for senior leadership.

It begins with the marketing plan. Marketing leadership should commit to an annual marketing plan, complete with goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, timelines and budgets. Top management should

clearly understand marketing's focus for the year and buy into it.

Having a plan is paramount. If you don't have a map to get you where you're going, you'll likely be diverted off course. The plan keeps you laser-focused on the goals at hand and should serve as the foundation for all marketing-related budget decisions.

The plan requires thoughtful consideration about your priorities and strategies, along with tactics that will get you there most efficiently. Some people are intimidated by the thought of producing a marketing plan. Keep in mind that it doesn't have to be slick or fancy — just clear, specific and measurable.

The plan also must be fluid; it's not cast in stone. Along the way you may need to make adjustments based on shifting market conditions or unforeseen circumstances. That's OK. Just make sure that if you change things up, it's a conscious decision to do so. Adjust the plan; update and document accordingly.

As you consider your marketing goals and plan for 2016, I'd like you to consider a few important questions.

From a marketing perspective, what strategies and tactics worked best this past year? How can I quantify this? Why were these most successful?

- What initiatives did not meet expectations? Why? What can I learn from this?
- Am I taking full advantage of today's marketing tools and technologies? If no, why not? How can I get up to speed on the available options?
- What new marketing innovations and test programs will I pilot in the coming year? How will I measure results?

Another topic that relates to the success of your marketing program deals directly with sales. The million-dollar question: How closely do your marketing and sales teams work together?

In my 35 years in the marine industry I have been extremely fortunate to work with some of the best and brightest sales professionals in the business, both on the manufacturing and the retail fronts. In my role as chief marketer in most of the business relationships I've enjoyed, I have worked very closely with the sales team to understand their challenges and design programs to address their needs.

By meeting regularly, actively listening and communicating frequently, we developed a strong sense of mutual respect that allowed us to reach common goals.

Unfortunately, that hasn't always been the case. In one situation I encountered a somewhat combative sales organization that was internally splintered, with petty jealousies over territorial marketing spend and lack of understanding of the overall company marketing plan and brand protocols.

Despite my best efforts to educate and communicate, there was a pre-existing cultural divide between sales and marketing that simply couldn't be fixed, coupled with a genuine lack of appreciation and respect for the marketing contribution.

In this particular scenario I met with the sales manager one on one to address my concerns. Together we found common ground and forged a way to work together to benefit our employer, but I sincerely regret that the rest of the sales team was excluded from the process.

I missed team insight that I had always valued, but we managed to work through it and nonetheless produce rock-solid results. Moral of the story: If you have difficulties working with your sales or marketing counterpart, I highly encourage taking a positive approach and meeting one on one with your peer to address the concerns. The relationship between sales and marketing simply must work: It is much too important to blow off.

Marketing should connect with the sales team regularly. Take a road trip and walk in their shoes on occasion. In my experience, they often have the best customer insights and are the first to spot shifts.

Savvy sales professionals can be valuable boots on the ground for campaign feedback. They also offer a wellspring of great ideas and enthusiasm.

Although not every idea or suggestion will have merit or be financially feasible, that's OK. In brainstorming you rule nothing out and take everything in. There is always something to be learned in the process of engaging.

Hint: To avoid hard feelings, I always preface a brainstorming session by saying it is for idea generation

and not every idea or concept ultimately will be used.

I've saved perhaps the most important focus for last, and I'll drive it home with a series of questions.

- What's happening with your customer base? Are there any demographic or psychographic shifts to your profile? Has the problem you are trying to solve for your customer changed?
- How are you communicating, and more important, engaging with your customers? What frequency? How are you delivering your messages? What is most effective? What needs improvement?
- Is your company meeting the needs and expectations of the customer? How are you measuring customer satisfaction?
- Why does your customer want to do business with you? What are your unique selling advantages? Has anything changed? How effectively are you communicating these distinctions?

There's another popular hit I can't get out of my head, but it reminds me of our most important focus. My apologies in advance to Meghan Trainor for the obvious lyrics and "bass" spelling liberties, but "It's all about the (customer) base, about the (customer) base, about the (customer) base ..."

Yes, friend. In 2016 and beyond, well into the foreseeable future, it is all about the customer. Marketers would do well to plan accordingly.

In conclusion, there's much to consider in planning your marketing for 2016. Don't be blindsided or shortsighted: It's so much more than where you're spending your marketing and media advertising dollars.

By the time this column hits the street or cyberspace, the new year will be upon us. If you have already completed your marketing plan, bravo! You're ahead of the curve — now go out and get it done.

But if you haven't started, I hope this column will be the impetus you need to get off your laurels, and as the iconic '60s band Steppenwolf wailed, "Get your motor runnin'!" It's past time to rev things up.

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