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Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

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A Keen Eye on Marketing

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Does your product stand out?

The aftermarket continues to be challenged by “me-too” products. Manufacturers need to focus on distinguishing their products from those made by others. How many wheel companies can sell the same design? How many brake parts manufacturers make the same performance claims?

It pays to take the time to seriously analyze your competitors’ products and develop messages and benefits that have your products and services stand out. These benefits might not be the obvious choices. Likely you’ll find key differentiators to be more about response times, customer service, sales training and sell-through support.

Remember: As the market becomes more and more customer driven, you should really know what your customers and prospects are really looking for in a supplier. Did I mention doing surveys?

Is your marketing communications working?

Once you’re clear on your key differentiators, your next step is developing communications program that markets these benefits. Our advice? Keep it simple. Clear away the clutter. Make strong claims, but make fewer.

Produce clear, consistent communications materials that have the benefits of buying from your company be stated cleanly and in your prospects’ language. Not to be too biased, but the desktop revolution has allowed many companies to produce their own in-house marketing materials at lower cost. Sorry to say, many of these communications materials look as “inexpensive” as they are. Your marketing communications materials are an expression of your brand. What quality of image do you want to promote?

Remember: Less is often more. Customers and prospects only have a limited time to truly see what makes one company special. How can you help make their job easier?

Is your sales process clearly defined?

“The Devil is in the Details.” Simply said—make this year different. Be sure your sales process keeps you in touch with your customers. Communicate with the people that met you at your exhibit quickly and frequently.

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We recommend a minimum of seven touch points over the next six months, whether they be by phone, email, mail, special offers, promotions of premiums.

Use a sales contact management system. If you are at the enterprise level, we recommend salesforce.com, PeopleSoft or Siebel. If you are a smaller organization, salesforce.com and ACT! are two of the better systems (ACT! is a off-the-shelf dedicated software and salesforce.com is an ASP). Define and memorialize the process.

Remember: Communication is the lifeblood of your organization – it works better when you keep it flowing.

Are your sales and marketing teams playing on the same field?

We witnessed some truly integrated sales processes at Las Vegas, and we saw others that were in complete disarray. Delivering uniform, standardized sales and marketing messages takes more than just having a rep meeting on the Monday before the event. Providing effective training to your sales team to communicate consistent messages, and to gather dependable customer (and competition) information, is a yearlong practice.

Remember: Your sales team is your front line. As your customers grow stronger and more focused in their demands for excellence in products and services, the feedback loop between sales and marketing needs to remain resilient. Sales training should also adjust in harmony with customer needs.

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