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RETAILING TONY GATTARI

Tips for retail marketing

RETAILERS ALL OVER the world are trying to do more with less as marketing budgets are slashed in these tougher economic times. But for those with a nose for a bargain and a little know-how, it is possible to extract good value from a shrinking budget. Looking beyond traditional mediums like television and radio may surprise you.

Word-of-mouth: Get people talking about your business by hiring a 'word-of-mouth' expert to start a conversation on your behalf. A 'Word of Mouth Company' operates and starts 500 conversations a day. Its team of 50 conversation starters are invited to speak at established community groups like mother's groups about up to seven brands an hour. It costs from \$1.30 per person and all feedback is tracked online.

Social networking: Companies need more than just a website to be truly part of the digital age. We recommend Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), which uses key words to make sure your business features prominently in search engines. Beyond that, consider social networking. Advertising on blogs or social networking sites is also increasing popular. It allows you to place your brand near industry thought leaders and remains relatively inexpensive.

Customer Relationship Marketing: Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems have long been the preserve of larger companies, but they are a great tool for smaller businesses too. The systems capture customer information and can be used to create targeted marketing campaigns. For example, if you decide to send an offer to lapsed customers, a CRM allows you to do this quickly and effectively.

Lots of companies seem to think CRM is the same thing as direct marketing, but

it most certainly is not. Most businesses can have an immense amount of dormant information on their computer systems that can be used to create more effective marketing campaigns.

Experiential marketing: Whether it's bubble wrapping lamp posts, creating pavement art or paying actors to argue in cinemas, experiential marketing (also known as ambient marketing) is on the increase as companies try to reach time-poor consumers. A great example of an experiential marketing campaign involved a campaign for the promotion of a new Ikea store. One night, the company put 50,000 Ikea swing tags on public furniture, and also drove around old Volvos loaded with Ikea furniture.

Direct marketing: Direct marketing includes brochures and offers sent in the mail, email and SMS communication, which can be very effective and relatively inexpensive. The costs vary depending on communication methods and type of design and production used. Direct marketing allows you to measure return on investment very effectively because you know who you sent the offer to and can track whether they come back and take up the offer.

Whisper campaign: Whisper campaigns are the mischievous cousin to word-of-mouth campaigns because the person being marketed to isn't aware of it. Companies might hire an actor to visit a bar and mention to unsuspecting punters how great an alcohol brand is, for example. It's hard to find anyone willing to admit they create whisper campaigns as it defeats the purpose, but they're alive and well in the marketing scene. Try calling a few advertising or PR agencies and you should be able to find someone willing to do the legwork. Just make sure no one blows your cover.

Turn on the media: Generate media interest in your business with some new-age tactics. Tourism Queensland's 'The Best Job in the World' competition generated far greater media interest than an advertising campaign ever could, with worldwide media coverage. Hiring a PR firm or marketing agency to engage the media on a project basis can be extremely cost-effective.

Corporate events: Organising a corporate event doesn't have to cost the earth. Friday night drinks and canapés at your office is a good start, although hosting an event in a stylish restaurant or art gallery can be a cost-effective marketing option. An event will give you valuable face time with your customers, but make sure you ask them to bring a friend so they can introduce a potential new customer to your business.

Negotiate with the media: Discounts can be found across the media landscape, with television, radio, newspapers, outdoor companies and online media operators all prepared to negotiate. After all, sales representatives still need to make budget despite the volatile market. Retailers should follow a few basic rules when dealing with the media to snare a bargain. Make sure your credit is good before you start negotiating and always deal with the highest level salesperson that you can. ●

■ Tony Gattari was previously the General Manager of the computers and communications division of Harvey Norman and oversaw the growth of this business from \$12 million to \$565 million in nine years. He is now founder and Chief Energy Officer of Achievers group. He is a professional speaker, business educator, author and business advisor.

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