

Five Steps You Need to Take Before You Spend a Dime on Advertising

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Usually, advertising doesn't come cheap, but it can be cost-effective—if you do your homework ahead of time and follow some best-practices.

Step 1: Set the benchmark for performance for each campaign

If you do not know what you are aiming for, you will hit it every time...

Before you spend your first dollar, ten dollars, or thousand dollars, know in advance the number of responses or impressions you need. Frame it this way: "I would call the campaign a success if..." Then answer the "if" part.

Don't be afraid to say "I need one call or signup or sale for every X amount of dollars I spend." It is the only way to set an objective goal for everything you try.

Knowing the specific results you want from each campaign will allow you to take the emotion out of your decisions and invest in what performs.

Step 2: Make sure your advertising fits your sales system

How and when you generate sales determines when and where you want to advertise.

- If you sell directly to your customer, ask yourself, "How many calls, leads, emails can I effectively handle in a day with my current sales staff or telemarketing center?"
- Consider how you handle each incoming lead. Do you have a system for outbound calls?
- Have you trained your sales staff to make outbound calls?
- What time of day do you generate the most sales?

The answers to these questions will determine the media mix you need use.

Step 3: Maximum results start with your message

Move from "me" or company/product-focused ads to "you" or "what's in it for the customer" focused ads.

You need to know your target customer and craft your message accordingly.

What key issues are important to them? What emotions or feelings do they experience before and during the purchase of your product or service? Identify them. Have your creative speak to the heart of what your customer is thinking.

Ever heard the car dealer ads that shout, "We're the No. 1 volume dealer in town." Does that make you care? No. What do you care about? No hassle up-front pricing? Guaranteed lowest price? Talk to your customers in words they use about what they care about.

If you were talking to a friend or relative who is interested in using a service like yours, what would you tell them to "watch out for" or look for? How are you really different from your competition?

Don't try to be funny. Let the guys who can spend \$5 million a Super Bowl spot do that. Instead, invest in benefits-focused creative. You will win more often than not.

Step 4: Choose a media mix that's a perfect match

Once you have determined how many responses or impressions you want, when you want your responses to come in, and who you want to talk to—then and only then are you ready to make media choices.

Know key differences in TV, radio, online, social, and mobile:

- Radio dominates 6 AM to 6 PM. It requires very little production cost, and you can change your message in hours.
- Television dominates 7 PM to 12 PM. It provides great branding associated with response, and production cost is high.
- Pay-per-click and other online advertising gives your real-time data you can act on quickly to improve performance. And it's extremely flexible.
- Social media is emerging as a powerhouse to drive awareness, leads, and prospects to your business. Make sure it's a part of your overall plan.
- Everyone knows how much time we spend on our smartphones. Several performance-based mobile opportunities are arising as mobile marketing expands rapidly.

Step 5: Test, measure, and take the plunge

You are never a fool for testing. You are only a fool if you do not have the ability to measure the performance of each advertising campaign to make sure it is achieving the benchmarks you established in the beginning.

Quantify the results you need on a weekly or monthly basis. You cannot manage what you

cannot measure. If it's number of customers walking into a retail location, year-over-year sales, cost per unique visitor, cost per call... set every campaign you run against that benchmark.

If the TV station, radio station, mobile buy does not perform, pull it. Refine it. Fix it.

Don't let yourself get to the end of a long campaign and then allow the advertising outlets to make excuses. Once you know what your benchmarks are, clearly inform those outlets what you need to make the campaign a success. Hold them accountable and give them the responsibility to earn your business again.