

Integrating Marketing Communications

By Brian Gallagher

As the dramatic growth and proliferation of media and communication avenues continue to change the way people get information, receive messages, and find resources, marketing efforts must continue to evolve to more effectively build brand awareness and preference as well as deliver a measurable return on investment. This evolution includes a shift away from traditional marketing approaches to integrated marketing communications efforts.

Marketing is everything a company does to create awareness, interest, and demand for its products and services. Marketing communications is about delivering a clear, compelling message to the right decision maker or influencer. Integrated marketing communications is a strategic approach designed to harness all aspects of marketing communication such as advertising, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, e-marketing, collateral, and other programs to work in coordi-

nation as a unified force rather than working in isolation. This approach enables the consistent delivery of coherent brand positioning through all marketing communications mediums. An integrated effort consists of planning, coordinating, and controlling the marketing communications process that results in a synergistic and seamless, customer-focused marketing program.

The development and implementation of an integrated marketing communications program involves four steps:

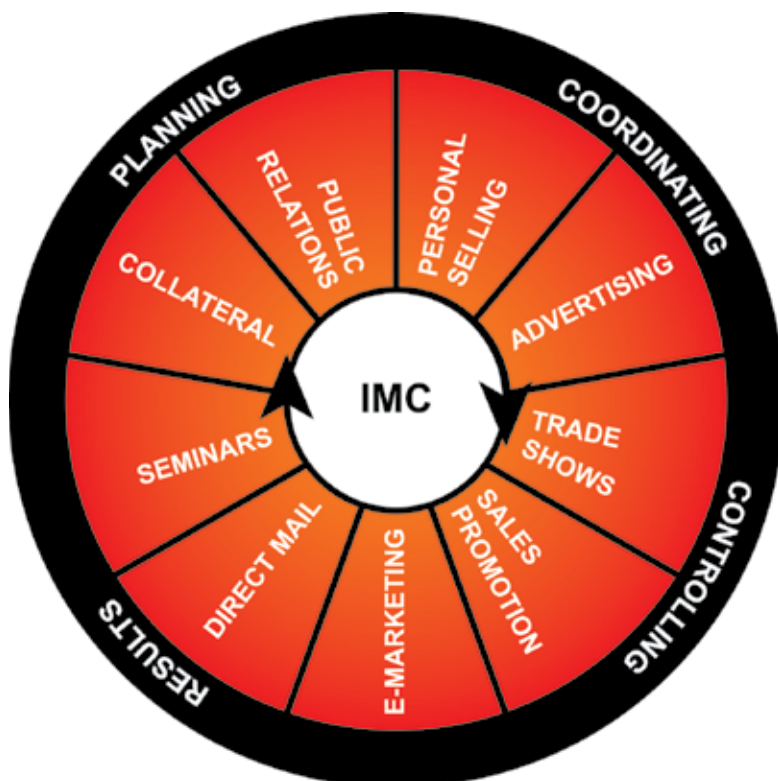
Developing a Database

The foundation of any integrated marketing communications program is a robust database. The database needs to integrate with the sales system or customer relationship management (CRM) program and track information about prospects, customers, and decision makers. The marketing database allows marketers to measure and evaluate customer purchase behavior and to gain valuable customer insights that help identify target markets and segments for the marketing communications strategy.

Strategic Marketing Plan Development

The strategic marketing planning process should involve internal and external research and analysis, market segment analysis, marketing plan development, as well as resource allocation and budget development. A core brand strategy must be developed to ensure that brand communications are clear and consistent through all aspects of the customer's experience with a company. A core tenant of this strategy is that all communications emanate from a single strategic marketing platform.

Integration of all of an organization's messages will maximize reach, power, and impact. Integrating each component of the marketing program draws from the strength of each initiative. For example, direct mail will more likely be opened because the recipients saw an advertisement; magazine readers will be more likely to respond to an ad because they read an article about a product or service; trade show



attendees are more likely to approach personnel at the show because they received a e-mail; and web surfers will be more likely to visit a website because a search engine ranks a site high in natural searches or information found in a blog.

Another key component is the focus on multiple stakeholders. Traditional marketing approaches may only address one stakeholder or target. Integrated marketing communications integrates communications across multiple stakeholders including customers, prospects, current and potential employees, vendors, investors, media, and business partners.

Tactical Implementation

Once the marketing plan has been developed, it is critical to build a structure for implementing, managing, and executing the marketing program. Implementing an integrated marketing communications program requires careful orchestration of all marketing activities; continual monitoring; and, particularly, articulating a clear, compelling message.

Measurement and ROMI

The final component of an integrated marketing communications program is measurement. Any marketing program must have specific and measurable

goals and objectives—not just leads and awareness, but opportunities proposals and profitable jobs. Focus on measurement and generating a return on marketing investment (ROMI) will lead to continual refinement and improvement.

Companies seeking an efficient, cost-effective, controllable, measurable marketing program must commit to an investment in an integrated marketing communications program. Integrated marketing communication is more than the coordination of initiatives—it is an aggressive, dynamic, and results-oriented marketing plan that can deliver results. Companies that implement integrated marketing communication programs will enjoy a significantly greater return on investment than independent traditional marketing efforts.



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