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Good marketing, properly targeted, properly thought through and properly costed will always benefit a company.

But many small and medium sized businesses ('SMEs'), with time and budget constraints, often pay too little attention to this key business activity. In a competitive market place, doing nothing is not an option.

**Peter Mann** of Buzz Associates, who works with SMEs to help them improve their marketing, believes companies should use common sense when planning their marketing and their **marketing communications**.

His advice is to think about what you would like to do – it is better to be product specific rather than generic – define your market, justify your ideas to your colleagues, budget carefully and measure the results.

# Common sense Marketing

*Marketing communication – it used to be called publicity – is the side of marketing everyone likes to have a hand in. Here are a few pointers to getting the best out of your budget and your ideas.*

## Budget first

Set a realistic budget in relation to your profits and turnover. Itemise the actions that best promote your business. Look at where your orders come from – *and concentrate on those actions bringing the greatest returns.*

## Your markets

Define your target audience and your markets and decide if they need segmenting – by, perhaps, market sector or geographically. Consider the best approach – through one avenue (e.g advertising) or multi-disciplined (say direct mail, PR and a special website).

## Advertising (press)

Advertising can still be very effective, but you *must* understand who reads the publications you plan to use – ask your customers what they read and forget any title that is dubious. Always ask for a discount. Keep your ads simple – and plug the major benefits, not just the features.

## Advertising (internet)

Experiment with pay-per-click (PPC) – it is likely to prove more cost effective than press advertising. The most successful PPC advertisers (and there are plenty of them) pay great attention to finding the best key words – Google has on-line resources to help you.

## Press releases

PR is a great way to build credibility because your announcement effectively has the backing of well known trade magazines. Remember, though, editors want *news* that is *relevant* to them. Try to avoid 'administration' charges.

## Promotional literature

Make your brochure a sales aid that helps you to sell when face to face with a prospect. Keep your literature simple but good looking and easy to read. Highlight all the benefits and use facts not waffle. It's worth investing

in good photography too – which can also be used in ads, PR, exhibitions, packaging and on your website for years to come.

Colour printing is inexpensive and of extremely high quality these days, so don't be stingy – your brochures should show your company in the best possible light.

## Direct mail

Despite the success of electronic media, good direct mail, whether a postcard, sales letter or catalogue, can work – accurate targeting and relevance to the prospect are, as always, vital.

How current is your database? Keep adding contacts and prospects who are relevant – mail them on a regular basis before they forget you and go to your competitors.

## E-mail shots

Great for short, sharp reminders of a special event or offer. Tying in with a conventional mailshot does wonders for response rates.

## Newsletters

Excellent for keeping in touch with customers, prospects, staff and distributors – but the emphasis must be on *relevant news* to the main audience you're targeting, so don't navel gaze. Regularity of publication also matters – as is making it easy and attractive to read.

## Websites

How important is having a website? Very – and is expected of you. Websites can either be an electronic brochure or a vehicle for buying direct. Both are fine and either can be right for your business.

Quality of presentation is very important – your site should be fast to download, up to date, easy to read and navigate, with plenty of useful information, including your contact details on *every* page.

The golden rule is ***Are you making it easy for the visitor – and for search engines?*** And do promote your web address.