



BEST PRACTICES

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A look through the marketing glass

Having trouble talking with your marketing team? We may know why. The first question can make or break the interview. “What is it we’re selling?” broke the ice.

“Why, it’s beautiful spaces, healthy living and artful gardens,” said the new-to-the-industry candidate experienced in marketing but whose wilted houseplants clearly meant landscaping was a risky career move.

“No,” said the marketing director. “We’re in the business of selling labor.”

Even after years of selling and writing about beautiful spaces, healthy living and artful gardens, despite the time-and-materials caveat, one thing is true: Landscape companies and the people who seek to market or promote their services are not always on the same page.

Being able to create and execute successful, persuasive marketing campaigns means being able to understand the full range of perspectives that people hold. Creative people, said an art director friend, think and deploy in bursts. They solve problems they cannot see. Contractors think sequentially and in tangibles. We are, he mused, circles talking to lines.

Communication styles and geometry metaphors aside, there are other disconnects when it comes to why it’s so tough to get traction and find magic in marketing; why companies think their marketing is broken; or why the quest for innovation and new approaches to old problems is never-ending.

To kick off a new year and inspire a new way of thinking about your own marketing efforts, your agency folks or the dynamics within your company between those who provide the bang and those who manage the buck, we’ve come up with a dozen takeaways guaranteed to provoke, irritate or comfort you, depending on which side of the marketing glass you’re looking through.

1. Marketing is central to all you hope to achieve. It’s not a value-add, add-on or one-off.
2. A clear vision and cohesive, goal-based marketing program will increase sales and revenue.
3. Marketing fundamentals—the business objec-

tive, knowing the customer, having relevant quality content and sense of community—plus tactics, communications tools and creative direction must be aligned with strategic business objectives.

4. When you can point to your marketing initiatives and know how they’re helping you affect your key business goals, you’re on the right track.

5. Marketing efforts should be quantifiable, prioritized, given a timeline and tied to an audience.

6. Your business plan should have a marketing component that addresses how you will promote and position your company, manage your reputation, sell your services, communicate with your customers, own your message and grow your bottom line.

7. Marketing your company is an ongoing endeavor and an energetic, perpetual-motion machine. It involves imagination, preparation, planning, organization, execution and a nimble IT infrastructure.

8. A marketing culture that’s technologically up-to-date, social-media savvy and demographically attuned will give your company distinct advantages.

9. Backing into a marketing program without a game plan or measurable goals will ensure a frustrating experience and costly outcome.

10. Marketing has a cost. So does new equipment. Both affect revenue. Often it seems there’s a better plan for the snowplow than for marketing. Get to know your marketing people just like you get to know your supply chain people so they understand the demands you have on the job.

11. Brainstorming sessions can be great. They can be made greater and deliver better, stronger ideas with effective collaboration. Invite cross-functional teams to the table to share ideas in real time. Then triage, implement, track and measure.

12. In the absence of a single-source or in-house resource, bringing together outside freelancers—graphic design, content, social strategy, web development—and creating an integrated “ad hoc agency” team bundles collective energy for success; it improves project communication, delivers better, more integrated results and saves costs.

EDITOR’S NOTE

This month, Best Practices columnist Bruce Wilson asked his marketing consultant to take the pen. “In my conversations with contractors, marketing is easily the most misunderstood of all functional and financial priorities,” Wilson says. Let’s turn to Cheryl Steelberg for her take.