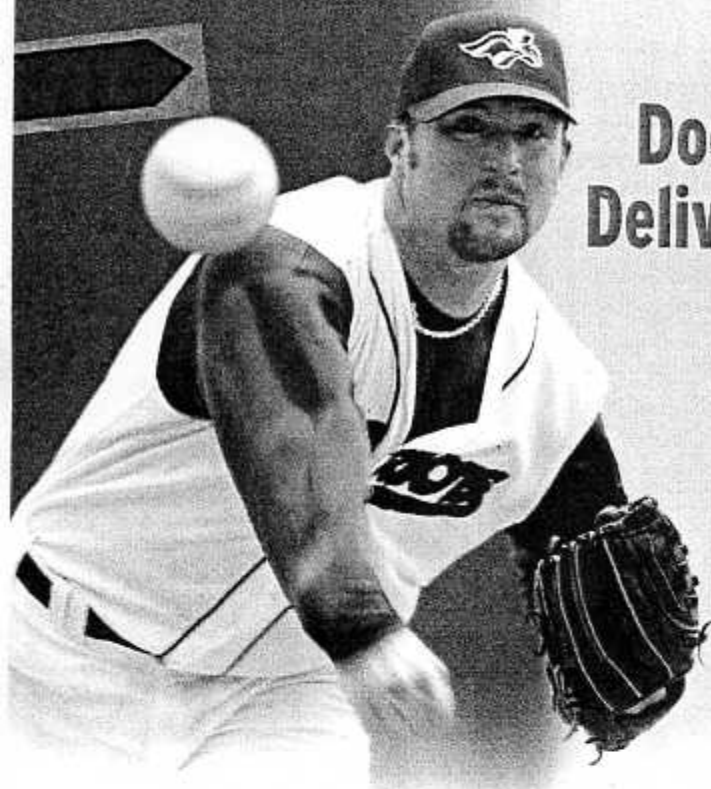


Does Your Advertising Deliver the Perfect Pitch?



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ADVERTISING IS ALL ABOUT CONNECTING with customers. Words, images and how they are delivered mean something—and in the hands of the experts—the right message can translate into new business and a stronger brand identity. To assess what makes a good ad, how a branding campaign can work in niche markets, and what can be done to use all of the mediums available today, *COMMERCE* magazine asked the leaders of key advertising/communications firms for their thoughts on how to turn marketing collateral into revenue for the bottom line.

The following advertising executives participated in this special report: Success Communications Group Executive Vice President Michael G. Cherson, APR; Creative Marketing Alliance President and CEO Jeffrey Barnhart; The David Henry Agency President & Chief Communications Officer David Fink; Princeton Communications Group CEO Lawrence Krampf; Linett & Harrison CEO, Creative Director, Chairman Caryl Linett; The Marcus Group, Inc. President & CEO Alan C. Marcus; Oxford Communications President John Martorana; Sigma Group President/Partner Shannon Morris; GraficaGroup President and CEO Debra Taeschler; and The CBK Group Partner/Creative Director Bill Troncone.

Michael G.
Cherson, APR



"More than ever, authenticity is crucial, as consumers are better informed and more skeptical—which means ads must be beyond reproach."
—Success Communications Group Executive Vice President Michael G. Cherson, APR

Jeffrey
Barnhart



"When you've been cut to just a couple of chances to reach your audience through print, you better make sure it's eye-catching, makes an impression and really states who the company is."
—Creative Marketing Alliance President and CEO Jeffrey Barnhart

Q. How can a company establish a brand in niche markets? What are the elements of a successful branding campaign?

CHERENSON: Today, thanks to the rise of such social media as blogs, Facebook and YouTube, there is greater opportunity than ever before to access and leverage niche markets. In fact, the phrase "Long Tail" describes the niche strategy that involves selling a large number of unique items in relatively small quantities. Chris Anderson of *Wired* magazine, who coined the term, called it "the shattering of the mainstream into a zillion different cultural shards." Depending on the market, social media could supplant or support traditional marketing strategies. While there is greater access and opportunity, brands still need to deliver on their promise, exceed expectations, communicate effectively and consistently, and build a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with their markets. Now, more than ever, trust and authenticity are essential. Traditional methods certainly continue playing an important role in the marketing mix, but brands would be wise to consider how social media provides the opportunity to listen, talk to and energize niche markets.

BARNHART: The advertising, marketing and public relations industries are all currently at a turning point where agencies must rethink how they reach their target audiences. It is now imperative that agencies consider the technologies that their niche markets are using, such as podcasting, and design a strategy where these new media work together to complement traditional print, radio and television advertisements. This often takes more strategic planning as to how a company or product wants to be perceived and how brand messages will change to resonate with different types of audiences. The bottom line is that a branding campaign is only successful if you think of reaching your target audience in terms of quality, not quantity.

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David Fink



"A good print advertisement serves its strategic intent; is less copy-heavy than in times past; quickly delivers a message to its intended audience; and engages the reader." —The David Henry Agency President & Chief Communications Officer David Fink

FINK: As a brand, you need to act like a politician and get your vote out. Tell people who you are, what you stand for and what you can do for them. Establish credibility and tell them why you are unique—especially when there are well-known companies providing your product or service in your prospective markets. Establish a platform for your marketing efforts that specifically addresses the needs and wishes of the niche community and how you will fulfill those needs. Retain some key industry people to be your "cheerleaders" (those who already cast a large shadow: consultants, leading manufacturers, media, others). Announce your 'ticket' by executing a comprehensive marketing/PR/media plan that not only makes a splash but also sets the stage for a long-term sustained campaign. Having the right offer with the right story and the right people supporting you is a terrific foundation for capturing the lion's share of a vertical market.

KRAMPF: These days, to create a successful brand in a niche market, there are certain fundamental decisions that need to be made up front. Having a deep understanding of your target audience and how your product will satisfy their need is perhaps the most important aspect of any new branding effort. Having a clear position that you can own relevant to the competition, and the confidence that your product can deliver on its promise are also key decision factors. Then you must set realistic objectives such as how fast you want to grow, what share of market you want to achieve over the next three years, and develop a budget that you feel will accomplish your goals. The next phase is to implement the strategy, creative messaging and developing a media mix that touches the target audience in as many ways as possible over and over and over.

LINETT: The key is finding the niche within the niche market that reflects the unique aspects of the company's product/service as well as the company's DNA. It doesn't matter if it's a consumer or a B2B client; the same principles apply. The visual and verbal tone speaks volumes about the company's brand; implicit messaging is every bit as critical as the explicit. There should be a single-minded focus so that the branding is unequivocal and powerful. A strong positioning line is important. Solid strategic thinking is essential not only in developing the creative, but also in selecting the right media vehicles,

from broadcast to print to Internet, so that every dollar hits the right audience with the right message—one that will compel, resonate, and motivate. Above all, everyone at the company has to live and breathe the brand; everything must deliver the brand promise and personality every time the customer comes in contact with the company or its product/service.

MARCUS: Differentiation is key. To establish your brand you must find what makes it unique and better than your competition. A successful branding campaign takes commitment. Brands aren't built overnight; it takes time, work and focus to keep your brand name in front of your target audience. Knowing how and where to reach your audience is essential. Casting too large of a net can result in low impact and awareness. It's easier to make a big impact to a small key audience than to make a big impact on several different audiences at once. Choose your mediums carefully. For example, short messaging with visual appeal is ideal for outdoor and online ads. Branding campaigns should be short and simple. Focus on one brand attribute at a time. If you have three or four messages, consider a series of ads. This will give your campaign the legs it needs to maintain momentum.

MARTORANA: Communicating effectively to a niche market is based wholly on understanding the culture of that specialized group. We start with questions. What makes this group "niche"? What inspires them? What challenges them? Who are their heroes and why? How do they live their days? When you get to the essence of that culture and truly understand who they are as humans, what they think and feel, where they live their lives, you can then create for them and compel them to act. They will believe in your brand because you understand them and reflect who they are in message and medium.

MORRIS: When communicating to niche markets, it's strategically important to understand the consideration, trial and purchasing dynamics of your audience specific to those markets. This is a critical first step to establishing a strong, meaningful and resonating brand message. A brand that is successful will deploy a well-integrated and consistent marketing mix that resonates at all touch points—and that establishes credibility and validity relevant to niche markets. Providing communication that "speaks their language" that is delivered in a way that is relevant to a "day in their life" goes very far. For niche markets, consider deploying relevant traditional, non-traditional, emerging and social media applications to gain awareness. Consider cultivating relationships with cus-

Caryl Linett



"A good ad has to draw in the reader and not waste his or her time but rather inform quickly while entertaining." —Linett & Harrison CEO, Creative Director, Chairman Caryl Linett

Lawrence Krampf



"Keep the communication simple. Keep an open mind. Don't clutter or throw everything about the product into the ad." —Princeton Communications Group CEO Lawrence Krampf

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