

Marketing messaging > the right message, not a right mess

Getting your messaging right and consistent could be the difference between being ignored and your target market taking action.

To help you avoid a mess, and get your message across this sheet covers the following:

1. An objective
2. Customer insight
3. Fit with your brand positioning
4. Targeting and tweaking
5. Truth
6. Being single minded
7. Impact
8. Mapping it out and timing
9. Go back and check

A brand new brochure, email marketing campaign or website needs content. Copy, words or blurb, whatever you want to call it, you'll need to decide how to match your attention grabbing creative design style with equally impactful stuff to read.

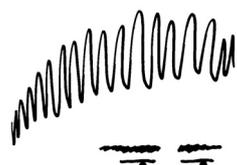
In deciding what to write you'll need to decide what the key message or messages are that you want to get across. Get the balance and impact of key information wrong, or the insight into your customers wrong, and you'll fail. Lack clarity and engagement in how it is written and it'll be a dud.

If you are busy sorting materials to support your sales activity and market your company then you should find this useful. It's a quick and easy shortlist of things to consider before committing your precious marketing budget. Use it to help you through the process if you're writing for yourself, or as a check to see if your agency suppliers know how to get the best from your investment.

A clear communications objective

Clarity around knowing what you want the piece of activity to achieve is a good starting place. Is this a hard hitting lead generation communication to new prospects? Or an offer to existing customers to get them to buy more, or even up-grade? Alternatively, you may need a communication to your loyal customer base to thank them, introduce a loyalty incentive or show them the very latest products, solutions and thinking you can provide.

Whatever the task, and it could be a hybrid of some of the above if done well, it's worth deciding early what you want it to do. Be single minded (we come to this later) and ensure you know what the main objective of the piece is.



Customer insight

You don't need extensive research, data tables and a research agency to get to the bottom of what drives your customers to choose you. This level of information could definitely help, but you and your sales people should know from interaction with your customers what drives them.

Some examples help illustrate the point:

Homeware internet mail order company

Basic insight: Consumers need stuff like lights, kitchenware and furnishings to make their home look good

Interesting insight: Love individuality and items you wouldn't normally find in the High Street chains? Love the thought of friends saying, 'Wow, where did you get that?'

Fantastic insight: Like the thought of buying British? Prepared to pay for handmade items that are ultra exclusive

UK based kids fun-park

Basic insight: Parents need to entertain the kids in the holidays

Interesting insight: Parents will go more than once because they don't have to think of new things to do. They want variety so it doesn't get boring, and entrance made easy and good value with a season ticket scheme

Fantastic insight: Kids love the characters from the biggest TV shows

Imagine how much richer your messaging (and product offering) becomes when you delve deeper into customer needs. A magazine ad with messages based on the basic insights outlined above would rely on creativity and brand awareness alone for impact, for instance 'Entertain the kids this summer' is dull.

Something that states your kids can meet the cast of High School Musical and you could get 10% off a season ticket on the same day becomes far more impactful. Similarly 10% off to celebrate exclusive great British homeware designers really taps into the core drivers of the customer, rather than a dull money off deal.

Fit with your brand positioning

Every brand should have an agreed brand positioning – or in other words clarity on what you stand for in the market. It should be the foundation and starting point for all of your marketing activity, as it ensures your brand is unique, strong and clearly communicated. So it's vital your messaging fits with, and works towards, maintaining your overall positioning.

An example might help. Take the kids fun park we talked about earlier on, and lets suppose their overall brand positioning is 'Entertaining Exercise' as they have all sorts of things for kids to climb, bounce, leap, run and jump in, on and through. A better message to fit the brand position would state your kids could come and do a 15 minute dance routine with the cast of High School Musical, whilst you do a celebratory jig with 10% off season tickets.

As you can see, everything starts to come together rather nicely when good strategic foundations are laid.

Targeting and tweaking

If you've spent the time segmenting your customers into distinct groups then ensure your messaging reflects their discreet needs, rather than a more blanket approach. It could be that the vast majority of the communication remains consistent, with only small changes made to make it even more effective.

A customer offer for instance could be based on the same basic 25% off mechanic, but headlines or key messages could vary massively if you can keep the different communications discrete:

- For irregular customers – 25% off to tempt you back
- For discerning big spenders – a big 25% discount for our biggest spenders
- For the budget conscious – in tough times we thought 25% would help

The list could go on, and you would probably change the discount depending on the segment, but this illustrates the point that one marketing communications exercise needn't be met with exactly the same approach in the messaging.

Truth

If you're going to lead with a big claim, or big offer then make sure it stacks up against scrutiny. Not only because advertising should always be decent, honest and true to keep you out of trouble with the ASA (Advertising Standards Authority), but just as important you will damage your brand and company prospects by bending the truth or making claims that use very sharp ways of getting a headline statistic.

Being single minded

Going right back to the beginning, about setting an objective for the communication, so you make sure your key message gets across. It's essential you choose the most motivating message to lead on, and ensure it's based on your customer insight.

The simple reason being that you are fighting for people's attention, and once you have it you are then fighting to get your message understood and remembered in a very short space of time. People are bombarded, and can't be bothered to trawl through detail, so make it easy.

What you say and how many messages you can get across will vary on the media you use. A brochure or website can be more detailed than a poster which can carry only ten words for instance. You will still need to be rigorous in making sure your key messages have enough room to stand out. Similarly a piece of direct communications or a press ad can carry more than one main message. But, don't be tempted to drone on with point after point and then expect your call to action to stand out. People will just switch off.

Impact

Get to the point quickly. And make sure that headline message taps into the customers' core need and your insight into why they will buy from you.

Immediacy and waffle free copy is so important, so make sure your key message is out in the open, and clearly written within the headline and first couple of sentences.

It's also worth making sure your headlines and copy are written in a way that gets across the functional benefit (for example, 25% off) and also elicits an emotional response – you'll be creating a stronger impact by doing so.

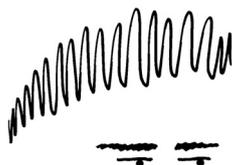
Message mapping and timing

A map of what you will say, to whom and when can add great structure to your communications if you have anything more than just a simple programme of activity.

Seeing an overall plan of how offers, product launches and thank yous map out across the year gives you a clearer insight into how much your customer could be receiving. It will also show how the combined messaging strategy is working with other marketing and sales activities towards a more solid and valuable customer. You can also use it to tap into seasonal insights or buying patterns to ensure you tailor messages and themes at the right time.

Go back and check

Finally, see which messages work best across the year so you can review and refine your programme. See which messages are failing and change them – it could be that you need a better insight into your customer needs, or perhaps your copy and headlines need to be better written and structured.



*I cannot take the credit for this article. I found it a long time ago, from where I can't remember — but I found it fascinating and kept it. So if the original author reads this then my apologies for reproducing without permission!

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