

Clairvoyant Communications

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PRESENTS**

**A White Paper On:**

**Leading  
Marketing Communications Mistakes  
Companies Make**

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# Clairvoyant Communications

## Summary

Marketing communications programs work. They help businesses sell their products and services. There's a catch, though. (Isn't there always?) You need to do things right – like define the right audience, follow up with leads, and stick with it!

You can spend a lot of money on these programs, so getting results matters. Here are the top mistakes I see companies make when using marketing communications, plus my suggestions for how to avoid them.

### 1. KEEPING IT A SECRET

This seems basic, but many business people either forget the need to get out the word or purposely avoid this step because they're worried about the competition. The usual outcome of not telling the world about your product, service, or company is disappointing sales. Prospective buyers need to know about you and your offering before they'll buy. It's your job to tell them.

### 2. GIVING UP TOO SOON

It can take nine (9!) or more repetitions of a message before it sticks in a prospect's brain. Don't be alarmed if a single ad, mailer or whatever doesn't yield a phenomenal response. Keep at it with consistency, and you'll see results.

### 3. NOT USING THE POWER OF THE MIX

Repetition is good. But it can be expensive and hard to achieve if you rely on just one communications type. A mix of tactics carrying the same message to the same audience is more effective and affordable.

### 4. NOT BEING BUYER-ORIENTED

You know what you want to say. But do you know what your prospects want to hear? If you don't know, then ASK! Do some simple research. Prospective buyers pay more attention to messages that speak to their needs.

### 5. BEING BORING

Truth is, an uninspiring presentation will get through if it's repeated enough times. On the other hand, a fun, intriguing, interesting presentation of the same message will cut through the clutter faster. Why settle for boring?

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## 1) Keeping it a secret

Remember this truth: stealth marketing doesn't work. When it comes to successful business development, it's not what you know OR who you know, but WHO KNOWS YOU. It's hard for someone to buy from you if they don't know about you.

Awareness is so basic some business people overlook it or minimize its importance. But lack of awareness will stymie business growth every time. How do you create awareness? You need to be visible. Depending on your business, budget, and audience, these tools can help you:

- 1) **ADVERTISING:** This can be the most effective and cost-efficient way to create awareness if you have a broad audience that can be reached through publications, broadcast, the Internet, or other media avenues.
- 2) **MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS:** News releases, feature stories, and application case histories can get the word out about your product or service. This can be a SLOOOOOW way to build awareness, but the cost is less than advertising.
- 3) **DIRECT MAIL:** Mailings work best with narrow, well-defined audiences. A good list and a strong incentive to take action are essential whether you're sending your message e-mail or surface mail.

E-MAIL: Be sure you have the recipient's permission before you start sending e-mail marketing messages.

- 4) **TRADE SHOWS:** This is retail for business-to-business sellers. Attendees come to learn about new products and "kick the tires." They want to get up close and personal with your products and people, and they may expect to be entertained. This is your chance to add flash and sizzle to your presence. Make it fun, but make it meaningful, too.

Just be sure to repeat, REPEAT, **REPEAT** your message over time so it sinks in.

*True Story:* A company introduced a product but didn't budget for promotion. A few months later the CEO asked, "Why isn't the new widget selling?" Then we started a program of publicity, advertising, and trade show support, that generated inquiries. With follow-up these turned into sales.

*Moral:* Selling starts with awareness. Your audience needs to know about you and your product before they'll buy.

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## 2) Giving up too soon

What message from your Mom (or Dad) sticks with you? Is it “Always wear clean underwear”? How about “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all”? Mine is “Clean your plate.” (This could explain the excess poundage around my hips!)

These bits of advice stick with us for one big reason – **REPETITION**. You and I heard these messages again...and again...and again.

That’s a marketing communications lesson, too. If you want your audience to absorb your message, repeat it. And I don’t mean two or three times. Current wisdom says it can take nine or more repetitions for a message to sink in.

Wondering why it takes such an effort to make an impact? Consider these facts.

- Your target audience is inundated with messages. It takes an effort to break through the clutter. Repetition, combined with an intriguing presentation, will increase your odds of being noticed.
- We retain only about 10% of the information we’re exposed to each day. Repetition increases the chance your message will be part of that lucky 10%.
- Prospects buy when **they’re** ready. You need to be visible consistently to capture the prospect’s attention when he or she’s in purchasing mode.

So repeat, repeat, repeat your core message. Don't run one ad or send a single mailer and then curse your lack of results. Even if the message and audience are right, you need to repeat yourself many times to maximize results.

*True Story:* “We tried that once, and it didn’t work.” That’s what a manufacturer said about direct mail, but we convinced them to try, try again. A three-part mailing series repeated several times throughout the year got great response.

*Moral:* It can take nine (yes, 9!) or more repetitions for a message to sink in.

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## 3) Not using the power of the mix

Visibility is essential for business growth. But you don't have to use the same vehicle over and over. In fact, the most successful marketing communications programs use a variety of ways to deliver a company's message: publicity, direct mail, advertising, trade shows, web site, literature and more.

Mixing it up increases a program's effectiveness since prospects get the same message in a variety of forms. It can also make repetition more affordable.

But how do you stay visible with very limited resources? Here are some programs I recommend.

- 1) Postcard mailings - Use postcards to ask for referrals, announce events, build web site traffic, say thanks, and more. Of course, for best results you need a good list and repetition.
- 2) News releases - Does your company bring new products or services to market? Publish literature? These are great subjects for news releases. Send releases to relevant publications and web sites regularly to get more than your fair share of editorial coverage. Public relations activities like this are time-intensive, but cost much less than advertising. News releases are good web site content, too.
- 3) Feature coverage - Getting major coverage in the right media outlet can enhance visibility and credibility quickly. Use research and planning to ensure your topic is timely. Then target specific publications.
- 4) Case history articles - Highlight your company's capabilities with problem/solution articles. Well-written case histories are in demand -- by readers and editors alike. These stories make great web site content and can build stronger relationships with customers.
- 5) Internet - Creating and maintaining a web site is relatively low cost, especially compared to printed pieces like brochures. If you need to reach young adults, teens or business people, the Internet is where you need to be. E-mail marketing can be a good tool, too, but be sure to get the recipient's permission.

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- 6) Newsletters - Developing a good newsletter takes market smarts and careful planning. Then you need discipline and skill to crank out something worthwhile on a schedule. But it's worth it! A good newsletter can gain you loyalty, credibility, and – oh yeah – visibility.
- 7) Identity - Maintaining a consistent identity is a low-cost way to maximize your impact. Consistency and professionalism will help any business over time. Consistency solidifies ideas in our brains. Professionalism is about looking good. If you want to be taken seriously, present a professional image.

*True Story:* A business wanted to generate more inquiries but didn't want to expand their budget dramatically. They had been relying heavily on trade shows and advertising. We looked at inquiry generation and costs. Then we recommended reducing the trade show schedule a bit and adding marketing public relations to their communications mix. Inquiries went up while cost per inquiry went down.

*Moral:* Make repetition more affordable with the right mix of communications tactics.

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## 4) Not being buyer-oriented

I had a boss whose favorite saying was "Don't assume. It makes an ass out of you and me." Drove me nuts, but you know what? It stuck. It was meaningful, memorable (although corny), and it was repeated.

The marketing communications lesson here is "know your audience." If you want your promise (message) to be meaningful, you need to understand what's important to prospective buyers of your product or service.

If you've been working in an industry or market segment for a while, you may think you know what's important. And you may be right. But why not ask and confirm your thinking? You'll get your information "straight from the horse's mouth," and you'll avoid relying on assumptions.

Yes. This may involve market research. At this point some readers may gasp and say, "Too expensive!" I say, "Not necessarily." Most of us work in niches where you can do small "r" research for a small investment.

Here's what I mean. Think of 3-5 questions that will help pinpoint prospective buyers' hot buttons. Call your top customers and prospects and ask away. You'll have great conversations, and you'll learn something each time you talk to someone. Develop a matrix of everyone's answers, and you'll learn even more. Use what you learn to tune your marketing communications programs to address what buyers need to hear.

Email surveys are a possibility, but they have some drawbacks. The biggest problem is that respondents self-select, so you don't hear from a true cross-section. Plus, there's no substitute for human interaction, and that's what you get with this type of phone interview.

*True Story:* Design engineers were convinced about the key benefit for a manufacturer's newest product. However, phone interviews with prospective users pointed in another direction. This user input helped us craft the most successful product launch in the company's history.

*Moral:* Speak to what's important to users, and you'll get attention.

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## 5) Being boring

“You can’t BORE someone into buying your product.” So I’ve been told by a wise copywriter friend.

Memorable consumer ads have a funny or dramatic hook to get you involved. But what about the serious world of b-to-b marketing communications? Aren't we just presenting facts?

Certainly facts are important, but only in the context of how users can benefit from using your product or service. Once your message is relevant to what’s important to users, it’s time to develop a personality or image.

People buy from other people, right? As your company’s public face, your marketing communications pieces need to present a consistent, likeable personality.

One way to show a personality is by using humor. In marketing materials this might be communicated with light-hearted visuals or tongue-in-cheek headlines.

Art styles, photography styles, typefaces, writing styles, and page design all communicate personality. A good marketing communications professional will show you a variety of ideas to help you identify the personality that feels most authentic.

Your objective is to be memorable – in a good way – so you need to be distinctive, interesting, and believable. And consistent, long-term presentation of your personality is essential. That’s how buyers get to know you.

*True Story:* A company was getting poor response from their annual mailer to plant engineers. We spiced it up with a fun, memorable visual and headline. The new mailer (sent to the same list as before) got lots more responses than the old one did.

*Moral:* A fun, interesting presentation gets attention faster. So why be boring?

## **Clairvoyant Communications**

Of course, there are lots more marketing communications mistakes companies make – like not measuring results, not analyzing and learning from what they've done, or paying too much (or not enough) attention to competitors. Luckily there are marketing communications professionals who can help you. Find one you like and trust and start communicating.

***Happy Marketing!***