

# Selling Points *from the* Pros

Marketing, Ad Experts Share Top Tips



**M**ARKETING AND ADVERTISING ARE ALWAYS FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL HURDLES for the business owner, mostly because owners tend to focus more on delivering their products and services than on connecting with prospective buyers. But selling those products and services requires strategic communication, not to mention identifying the target audience, and that makes marketing and advertising essential to the enterprise. Small-business owners make up about 55 percent of the *ColoradoBiz* and *cobizmag.com* reading audience, so we asked marketing and advertising professionals to give readers some choice tips on how to improve their own marketing and advertising, a critical route to increased sales. Here is a compilation of their best ideas, both practical and conceptual. Our tip: Read on. You'll find at least one nugget you can implement immediately to improve your results this year.

**1** You can learn a lot about an agency from its branding efforts. A firm's logo, website and advertising, marketing and collateral materials should emotionally connect with you, and foster a positive, meaningful, customer experience. Additionally, branding components should differentiate and position a firm in its industry and — more importantly — in your mind. If an agency has failed to brand itself, is it the most prudent choice for your investment? *Theresa Fogle, Chief Brand Officer, EDGE – Communication by Design, Fort Collins*

**2** The success of building a brand through advertising, direct mail or online is greatly influenced by making certain every employee in every position in your business understands the brand promise and how to do his/her job in a way that supports that. If, for example, your branding positions your company as the one that smiles, you need to be certain everyone is smiling, that HR is training people to smile, incentives are awarded based on smiles, etc. When the brand is supported by the culture, the customer becomes a believer. *Bill Obermeier, Chairman, Stratecom, Boulder*

**3** Know your customer ... I mean really know your customer. See what it emotionally feels like to be them. Try hanging out where they do, wear what they wear, think like they think. Then and only then, decide what would appeal to them from a marketing communications standpoint. *Lora Ledermann, Creative Character, Scream Agency LLC, Denver*

**4** Don't build your marketing program on a wobbly brand foundation. First, before you ever develop another ad, brochure, website or news release, decide what your brand stands for and promises to deliver. Gather your management together (and not just marketing people) and answer this question: What, if anything, makes your company or product demonstrably unique in a way that is relevant and persuasive to your chosen market? Then build your entire operation — not just your marketing efforts — around that promise and make sure you deliver on it. *Dan Christopherson, Christopherson & Co., Denver*

**5** Organizations must consider the rule of 4 and 6. It is important to “touch” existing clients at least four times per year and potential clients at least six times per year. A client “touch” can be defined as a direct-mail piece, hand-written note, personal telephone call, event invitation, special offer, thank-you gift or other direct marketing effort. It is important to remember that a company often considers changing service providers when the need arises or a situation dictates it. If your company has a consistent message and is consistently in front of the prospects, top of mind awareness is garnered and the company is likely to consider your services. *Sheila Stewart, CEO, Marketing Solutions & Results, Englewood*

**6** Don't waste your money on ads. Ads say don't read me. Don't watch me. Tune me out. Powerfully relevant and unexpected communication founded on true human insight says exactly the opposite. So while advertising may be what your company needs, make sure it looks and feels like anything but. *Mike Drazen, Managing Partner, Thomas Taber & Drazen*

**7** Businesses whose communications are based on complex, intangible and often esoteric concepts — engineers, accountants, attorneys, etc. — face a significant challenge in developing messages and delivering them to a



lay audience. In crafting their communications, these professionals must avoid confusing, technical jargon and speak plain English. It also helps if what they're saying covers the Four P's: (1) Prescriptive — offering a solution to a problem or challenge; (2) Predictive — offering an analysis of what the future holds for a particular industry or trend; (3) Provocative — something counterintuitive or at least different from what everyone else is saying; (4) Prudent — in other words, credible. *Drew Kramer, Director Strategic Communications, Intermountain Corporate Affairs, Denver*

**8** Define the purpose of your ad. All ads are trying to sell something. Pinpoint the objective. Do you want to change an attitude? Get on a customer's shopping list? Have the customer call an 800 number or hit a website? Determine the expected outcome. *Pasquale (Pocky) Marranzino, President, Karsh & Hagan Communications, Denver*

**9** The average time on a website is less than two minutes. A thorough online strategy based on usability, research, and intuitive navigation increases this statistic. *Karl Becker, CEO, Focus Logic Inc., Denver*

**10** It is absolutely essential to have a clear, precise, persuasive website. It must have a branded message on the home page that makes you want to read on; it must be easy to navigate and a joy to read; it must offer relevant information in bite-size chunks on every page; it must tell your complete company story, and provide a portfolio section that showcases exceptional work. *Kevin Reese, President, PMG Advertising Agency, Centennial*

**11** Media placement and creative development need to go hand-in-hand. A mediocre ad in the right place will serve as negative communication; a motivating ad in the wrong environment will fall on deaf ears. *Amy Hume, Media Director, Barnhart, Denver*

**12** Seek video companies that are internet savvy. The new equipment and software in the video industry is causing an evolution that is enabling companies to produce their 30-second spots at a fraction of traditional broadcast costs and can be aired on the Internet. *Daniel Montano, Creative Director, MontanoSolaria & MoSoFilms, Denver*

**13** The more successful the business owner or professional, the more personal notes they write. Thank people, recognize accomplishments and milestones, forward copies of articles you think might be relevant — and write your note in long hand. Most professions and businesses are relationship dependent; always have been and always will be. *Bob Weiss, President, Alyn-Weiss Marketing/Public Relations Inc., Denver*

**14** If you aren't sure how to create a quality print ad, hire a freelancer/agency or ask if the publication can create it for you. There is no point in spending big money in buying the ad space if it is going to portray an unprofessional image. A poor image is worse than no image at all. *Kristy K. Wingfield, Owner, Graphik LLC, Denver*



**15** When thinking about brand building, it's logical to think about how to reach your customers with the right messages. But start with your employees first. If employees can articulate the value of your company, product or service, they become walking, talking brand ambassadors for your company multiplying the impact of your overall marketing budget. It also means that your customers' experiences will be more rewarding because your employees embody the brand experience. *Sharon Linhart, President and CEO, Linhart McClain Finlon Public Relations*

**16** Be bold. Be brash. Be bigger than life. Don't just differentiate yourself from your competition. Divorce yourself from the competition and shout back at the category with unadulterated simplicity and jaw-dropping innovation. Never forget: No risk means no reward. *Megan Fearnow, Director of Account Management, and Missy Altergott, Brand Director, McClain Finlon, Denver*

**17** Developing an image in your market and making your services or products known requires continual repetition. Marketing isn't something you can do occasionally and expect it to be effective. It should be an ongoing effort. It never stops. *Bill Neal, Almaden Marketing Group Inc., Fort Collins*

**18** You must communicate with and reach your prospective customers where they are, not where you think they should be or where you are. Find out what your potential customers are reading, watching, listening to, attending or participating in, and communicate with them through channels that will capture their interest. *Susan Peterson, Almaden Marketing Group Inc., Fort Collins*

**19** Multicultural marketing will become increasingly critical as the population becomes more diverse and the buying power of ethnic consumer segments becomes more significant. Based upon erroneous assumptions about minority consumer income, education and purchase intent, many advertisers confine minority marketing to a small percentage of their overall marketing budgets. This practice limits brand growth and retention, as well as new customer acquisition. *Laura Sonderup, Director, U.S. Hispanic Marketing, Heinrich Marketing Inc., Denver*

**20** Measure relentlessly. Everyone knows it's true, but the discipline and courage it takes to measure results is hard for evolving brands (which are dominant in our market). The single biggest mistake we still see in marketing and PR programs is based on a false assumption that you can't measure marketing impact. The failure to do so has been a costly decision for marketers. *DeeDee LeGrand-Hart BRW LeGrand, Denver*

**21** Don't feel like you have to use a full-service advertising agency as your marketing arm. There are a large number of specialized shops in Colorado that allow you to cherry-pick your own all-star team of media, creative, account planning, research and PR services. Look for unbundled experts that re-bundle with others at the top of their field

so that you end up with the best service in all advertising and marketing disciplines. *Brett Grischo, CEO, Explore Communications Inc., Denver*

**22** Understand the Audience Engagement Process: There are seven steps to bringing a prospect from zero knowledge to becoming an evangelist for your company or product. We call it ARCTUTA: Awareness → Recognition → Consideration → Testing → Using → Trusting → Advocating. As long as you have a marketing tool that meets the prospect/customer at each of these stages, you can be confident that no opportunities are slipping through the cracks. *David K. Heitman, Creative Director, The Creative Alliance, Lafayette*



**23** Track and measure. All too often, marketing efforts are abandoned as ineffective for purely anecdotal or emotional reasons.

When you build tracking and measurement mechanisms into your advertising, promotions and public relations, you can gauge their effectiveness toward the desired results and even redirect them if necessary. *George Olson, Executive VP/Creative Director, Praco Public Relations and Advertising Co., Greenwood Village and Colorado Springs*

**24** Doing good is good for business. Make involvement in the community a key component of your marketing program. Research shows that consumers are more likely to support (and buy from!) a company that gives back to the communities in which it does business. Find community outreach vehicles that align with what you do, and use these vehicles as opportunities to get in front of your potential customers through product sampling and other creative techniques that showcase your company or your product. *Leana Clark and Christin Crampton Day, Principals/Co-owners, Schenkein, Denver*

**25** Although it seems an obvious 'tip', taking time to proof your ad relative to correct addresses, correct and working telephone numbers, hours of operation, etc. is a basic that often goes unchecked. Imagine taking the time and making the investment only to find that consumers can't reach you. *April Thayer, Thayer Media, Denver*

**26** Successful advertising is more than placing a few ads in the local newspaper or running some spots on TV. Rather, it's the result of careful planning, consistency of message, and ongoing analysis and adjustment to changing markets. *SU Ryden, Ryden & Associates, Denver*

**27** The lead of an effective and compelling press release should provide the reader the key news by addressing the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Mimic journalists' writing style by using the inverted pyramid — provide the most important information at the top of the release. Write in tight sentences and use short paragraphs. Releases have a greater chance of garnering media attention if they're

customized to the local market. *Nikki Denton, Vanguard Communications, Denver*

**28** The choice of advertising vs. public relations: Advertising gives you complete control over what you say and when you say it. It generally works only with frequent repetition. You surrender much of that control with public relations, especially relying on the news media for delivery of your message. But the trade-off is that public relations makes your message much more credible and memorable — and it usually costs a fraction of advertising for the same impact. *Ron King, Vanguard Communications, Denver*

**29** Don't blow your marketing dollars in one big push. One of the biggest marketing mistakes companies can make is to blow too much money on the launch of a company, product or service — and then not have enough budget to sustain the marketing program over time. Marketing is most effective when it occurs consistently and frequently. Budget carefully and ensure that there are enough marketing dollars allocated to continue to market over time after the big launch or re-launch occurs. *Courtney DeWinter, DeWinter Communications Inc., Denver*

**30** How you conduct your business is as important as the business you conduct. A Business Week/Harris Poll shows that 95 percent of adults believe companies have responsibilities not only to their shareholders, but to communities and employees as well. Cone/Roper's recent study shows that 66 percent of purchasers will factor in a company's responsible business practices — when price and quality are equal — in making a decision to choose a brand ...or not choose it. *Paul Jensen, One Tribe, Fort Collins*

**31** A strong employer brand means more productivity and better customer loyalty. You can build yours by making sure your employees have the tools and resources they need to do their jobs. The best way to find out is to ask them in a survey, then fill in any gaps that crop up. *Mark Hornung, Bernard Hodes Group, Denver*

**32** Community involvement is critical to your bottom line. Companies should get involved in their community not only because it's the right thing to do but because it can increase customer loyalty, sales and profits. Find a cause that overlaps with your target audience to achieve the best results. *Laurie W. Anderson, Anderson & Associates Public Relations Inc., Denver*

**33** Do you offer too much information on your website? Are you trying to address several distinct audiences? Websites are most effective when the visitor receives appropriate information immediately or via a single click. To achieve this, we often set up additional websites focused on a specific audience or product offering. *James B. Varner, Edit Bay Communications, Denver*

**34** Fifty percent of advertising and marketing is just showing up. Because if you don't, your competition

will. And, if you show up and have another 50 percent of consistent, frequent and highly creative messaging, you'll do well with your investment. *Robert Ham, Extra Strength Marketing Communications, Denver*



**35** Measure your Marketing ROI. Marketing is an investment, not an expense. Positive results can compound and grow exponentially. From clear, measurable objectives, develop a strategy and a plan. Don't cut corners on strategy. Its value can be priceless. *Michael Guzofsky, Creative Director, Pageworks Communication Design Inc., Denver*

**36** When advertising, remember that your audience will only respond if your message is consistent. Constantly changing your ad size and design will confuse the public and will decrease your chances of building a recognizable brand. Find a style that works for your company or products and stick with it for at least six months before deciding to change it. You'll be surprised at the brand awareness you create. *Betsy Martin, Principal, Decibel Communications, Centennial*

**37** Whether building a reputation, changing an opinion or selling a product or service, a communications plan requires a strong combination of earned media (PR), advertising and one-to-one contact. Success requires many impressions from trusted sources for an extended period of time. *Tracy Aiello, Freeman Wall Aiello Public Relations, Denver*

**38** Determine your strongest sales periods and advertise right before those dates. It is much easier to boost sales during natural sales spikes than to overcome down times. Flight your media vehicles (print, outdoor, radio, TV) at the same time to break through the clutter and increase recall. It is usually better to spend heavily one month and take two months off than to spread the dollars out over three months. *Leslie Hancock, Hancock Media, Conifer*

**39** Keep busy keeping busy. Don't wait until your business is slow to begin a marketing campaign. Spend the time and money to keep your business bustling even when things are good. You'll win in two ways — you'll have the budget to invest, and you'll even out your revenues, resulting in fewer slow periods. *Shelley St. John, President, Primary Objective, Denver*

**40** In order to create a common language and tone for a brand, it is critical to develop consistency in the copy tone of all communication types — print, web, newsletter, PR, et al. The common mistake of many brands is the lack of synergy between these distinct communication mediums that leads to consumer confusion. In the end, you want to tell one culturally relevant story through your communication strategy, not multiple stories. *Scott Mellin, CEO, Factory Design Labs Inc., Denver* ■

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