

Donald E. Parente

Kirsten L. Strausbaugh-Hutchinson



Advertising Campaign Strategy

A Guide to Marketing Communication Plans

Fifth Edition

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

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Donald E. Parente

Middle Tennessee State University

Kirsten L. Strausbaugh-Hutchinson

University of Georgia



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**Advertising Campaign
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Marketing Communication
Plans, Fifth Edition**
Donald E. Parente & Kirsten L.
Strausbaugh-Hutchinson

Vice President, General
Manager, Social Science &
Qualitative Business: Erin Joyner
Product Director: Mike Schenk

Sr. Product Manager:
Mike Roche

Content Developer: Ted Knight
Associate Content Developer:
Megan Fischer

Product Assistant: Jamie Mack
Marketing Director:
Kristen Hurd

Sr. Media Developer: John Rich
Manufacturing Planner:
Ron J. Montgomery

Marketing Manager: Jeffrey A.
Tousignant

Marketing Coordinator:
Christopher P. Walz

Art and Cover Direction,
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Analyst: Jennifer
Nonenmacher

Project Manager: Anne
Sheroff

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F O R E W O R D

How do you develop professional skills that are much in demand but so scarce in the market? Skills that are widely admired yet understood by few? Skills essential for success, yet hard to develop? This book offers a solution to this puzzle. Specifically, it addresses the ability to think and plan holistically in what is becoming a marketplace of ever more narrowly sliced skill sets.

Conceptual thinking is ultimately what drives great marketing ideas—always has, always will. From the early days of mass marketing to today’s highly segmented, fragmented, and not always well-integrated marketing, the ability to conceive and execute in complete propositions is what separates the extraordinary from the ordinary. It is what makes icons of brands like McDonald’s, Nike, and Target. In a time where there is excess production capacity in virtually every industry, rapid parity in product performance, and an exponential increase in the number of ways of reaching consumers, never has insightful, well-planned marketing been more important.

On a sustained basis, consumers are not moved and brands are not built by loosely conceived tactics that are not much more than a series of one-shot ads. Consumers respond to strategic marketing campaigns—great campaigns that are conceived holistically and executed in a truly integrated manner where the motivations of consumers, the dynamics of markets, and the strengths and vulnerabilities of competitors have been understood and the end game is to have specific objectives, strategies that create sustainable competitive advantage, and inspired execution across all disciplines.

However, developing the skills to think and create at the broadest level is difficult nowadays. There are two key reasons. First, because of the general emphasis on efficiency in business, most firms, client, or agency, don’t have the time or resources to develop people at the foundational conceptual thinking and strategy level. Second is a change in the way that marketing services are bought and sold, especially the unbundling of disciplines (creative, media, brand identity, interactive, promotion, etc.) and the development of specialists in each one of these disciplines. There are logical and beneficial reasons behind specialization, but it has made it harder to get experience at the whole-picture level. And this counts, because at some point, in some way, the whole picture—the entire marketing campaign—must come together. How well that happens

is largely based on the quality of the thinking up front and throughout the process.

That is where this book comes in. It is valuable both as a strategic grounding in all of the campaign plan components and as a reference for those who will spend their careers working in specialized disciplines. The more you know about marketing and campaign planning at the broad level, the more effective you will be at having your piece of the puzzle fit best and work its hardest.

I have kept a copy of the earlier editions on my reference shelf. Even after 25 years in the business, and a lot of campaigns, I find the principles here to be great thought starters or “templates” when beginning to organize my thinking. For example, because a problem well defined is a problem half-solved, the preparation of a situation analysis covered in Chapters 2 and 3 is a strong grounding for creating a campaign. I think the structure for making choices in message strategy outlined in Chapter 5 is particularly valuable, because all great campaigns have a clear “point of view” that reflects choices of how to approach the marketing issue. This chapter provides a path for those choices to be more deliberate. Lastly, because contemporary marketing must often “touch” an inclusive range of targets across a broad range of contact points, Chapters 8 and 9 are an excellent overview of the modern media and marketing tools landscape.

When I studied under Don Parente, he emphasized two things that would allow a person to have the best chance at advertising career success and fulfilling professional potential: taking advertising seriously and learning to think conceptually.

This book is a chance to do both.

John (Jack) Phifer

Board of Advisors, Moroch Partners Advertising

Former Managing Director/CMO Moroch/Leo Burnett USA

Former Managing Director Leo Burnett-Mexico



P R E F A C E

The major goals of this textbook are to train, coach, and empower students.

So this is it. You're faced with generating your first truly comprehensive marketing plan. Congratulations! You're now the "expert." Suddenly you have a real client who is looking to your team for savvy business solutions...but, at least some part of you is wondering how you're going to pull this off. You've had some experience, an internship, work with the student-run agency, perhaps some informal freelance jobs here and there. But you're worried that you don't remember all of the bits and pieces you've learned in your classes leading up to this. You're concerned about how to apply what you do know. You're not sure what your individual role or contribution will be to the project. You've heard horror stories about the volume of work involved. But equally true, you've seen so many of your friends make it through the process and witnessed the relief on their faces. You've observed their unadulterated pride when it all comes together and they're amazed at what they've accomplished. And most importantly, you've seen them show their plans books to potential employers and land mind-blowing job opportunities.

Long story short, it *is* a lot of work, there is no doubt. But it's well worth it ... and then some! So like it. No, love it. Embrace every minute of it and learn from each step in the process. By the end of the term you'll know more about the product than you ever thought possible, and you'll be completely in-tune with the target. You might even figure out what you want to do with your life! And then, during the course of your career, you'll become an expert in countless categories and on innumerable audiences. How cool is that? You'll be a more world-smart, well-rounded person for it.

Throughout the process, this text will be your guide, and at times, your best (most reliable) friend. It's written as a literal "how-to" manual for crafting creative and effective communication plans. Rather than a survey or introductory text, it is designed to serve as a nuts-and-bolts guide to walk you through the research, strategic planning, ideation, execution, media planning and evaluation processes in a lockstep fashion. Your team can consult the book as a handbook, following along chapter by chapter, and checking off steps, as you move from getting your head around the marketing challenge, into assessing the situation, identifying your most

promising opportunities, and then into offering sound recommendations as solutions.

Once you get your bearings, you'll be tempted to jump right into brainstorming creative ideas. Resist the urge. Seriously. Follow all of the fundamental steps presented in this book ... and in the *right* order. If you do, you won't go wrong. Your campaign will be grounded in product truths and human insights. And people will encounter your messages in the places where they're most relevant. So your efforts will have the most impact. You will build the brand while selling it. And you'll be a hero to your client. Not to worry. You're ready. In the immortal words of Home Depot, one of the nation's best loved and trusted brands, "You can do it. We can help."

HIGHLIGHTS OF ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

CHAPTER 1

This chapter gives an overview of both the new marketing environment and consumer mindset. It illustrates how recent changes in the landscape have affected communication planning. We discuss the importance of process orientation and present some of the core concepts that should be part of your mindset as you prepare for the campaign, including market segmentation, the communication strategy, integrated market communications, a campaign creative concept, and a well-rounded tactical mix. To close the chapter, we present a general outline that should help sum up the steps in a campaign planning endeavor.

CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

These chapters cover the components and construction of a situation analysis. They emphasize the importance of "finding the fit" between your brand and its audience(s). Chapter 2 focuses on analyzing the company and the consumer. It provides a broad coverage of many of the available quantitative and qualitative methods, and includes a thorough section on searching for secondary research information, online and in a typical university library, and an extensive discussion of syndicated sources. In addition to creating a firm grasp of general audiences, we address (1) special market segments including global, African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and gay/lesbian markets; and (2) special message strategies including multitiered advertising, cause-related marketing, and green marketing. Chapter 3 focuses on mapping out the marketplace, understanding the product, and conducting a thorough competitive analysis so that you know what you're facing before you begin to formulate a plan of action.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter addresses moving from research into findings, such as insights, problems and opportunities, and most importantly, into actionable objectives. We discuss the characteristics and significance of establishing good

objectives and make the distinction between marketing and communication goals. The chapter covers how both are set, what they aim to affect, and the ways in which they are measured. In addition, we emphasize how vital it is to determine where consumers are in the buying cycle when setting appropriate communication objectives.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter is about building your brand through a well-laid-out marketing communication plan. It explains the difference between a marketing and a communication strategy. The chapter focuses on five interrelated elements: the determination of the selling focus, the management of brand equity, the marketing communication expenditure, the positioning of messages, and the targeting and delivery of messages. We point out a migration from the classic advertising “push” approach to a more “invitational” method, as we present a powerful consumer courting metaphor that sums up the product adoption cycle. We also cover ways that you can allocate funds within your overall marketing budget.

CHAPTER 6

This chapter addresses strategic messaging and the crafting of smart, inspiring creative briefs. It examines all parts of the brief itself, including identifying a key fact, determining the prospect need or problem, setting an appropriate objective, defining the target audience and related insights, framing a brand promise, and providing adequate support. We cover a variety of product- and consumer-driven strategic approaches and provide an array of rules for talking to today’s consumer. From there, we delve into a central discussion of the campaign’s “big idea,” aspects that make a creative concept viable, and components such as design elements and tone that can lend consistency to your campaign.

CHAPTER 7

This chapter explores a variety of different brainstorming methods that can yield powerful campaign creative concepts. It contains discussion of techniques such as word association, clustering, dogma/heresy, exaggeration/hyperbole, paradoxical intention, and visual analogy/metaphor. And after you’ve landed on an idea, the chapter emphasizes many important executional considerations, from the development of headlines and visual storytelling in print and out-of-home, to script and storyboard construction in broadcast channels.

CHAPTER 8

This chapter speaks to the endless a la carte menu of message outlets that you can employ to lend strength and momentum to your campaign. We present the consumer touchpoint map and examine application of a

multitude of disciplines, including advertising, public relations, direct response, personal selling, and sales promotions. In addition, we discuss many subdisciplines that are becoming more and more prevalent, such as social media, viral, guerilla, grassroots, experiential, event and influencer marketing. Most significantly, this chapter contains a convenient guide that matches tactics to common communication objectives, making it easy for you to devise a marketing mix that tiers up to fulfilling your goals.

CHAPTER 9

This chapter begins with a brief examination of the elements that make up a media plan, including objectives, strategy, and tactics. The chapter then proceeds to explain how to implement the basic media decisions: first, by examining what is involved with setting both quantitative and qualitative media objectives; and second, by breaking down media strategy into its essential elements. We include an in-depth discussion of fundamental media terms such as reach, frequency, gross impressions, ratings, CPM, CPP, and so on, as well as the distinction between flighting, pulsing and continuous plans. The chapter finishes with an all-important explanation of *how* to execute the media strategy.

CHAPTER 10

This chapter focuses on how to evaluate the effectiveness of your campaign. Clients want ROI, and here you can learn to serve up an assessment plan that measures everything from message reception and persuasion to the value in your individual tactics. We present a comprehensive view of the many tests and techniques that are used to measure a campaign's effectiveness, briefly covering many of the commercial research companies that are involved in this type of testing. Unlike many of the chapters in other books on this topic, this chapter is organized correspondent to when the need for a particular type of research would arise in a campaign. We discuss concept testing, then move to in-depth discussions of copy testing, concurrent testing, and posttesting. And we also include methods for evaluating today's more alternative marketing tactics.

CHAPTER 11

This section addresses the momentous task of crafting your comprehensive marketing plans book and outlines everything you'll need to include in it from cover to cover. It focuses largely on interpreting and presenting the material contained in the previous chapters. The chapter includes the "Top Ten Tips on Putting Together a Plans Book." For this edition, we added recommendations regarding design components, template construction, and how-tos on "selling in" the overall campaign concept and presenting creative executions. The chapter integrates the ideas and advice of various educators around the country who either teach an advertising campaigns course or work with the AAF competition.

CHAPTER 12

This chapter focuses on helping your team prepare a powerful, winning pitch. This section addresses client, agency, and educational audiences; presentation locations; and a variety of presentation software platforms. We discuss both the essential content and preferred order in crafting a compelling campaign pitch. We provide tips for creating visual aids, presenting research data, and powerful “storytelling.” This chapter also includes an extensive discussion of the special problems associated with the National Student Advertising Competition sponsored by the AAF.

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Don Parente
Kirsten Strausbaugh-Hutchinson
2014



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I N D E X 385

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

A Guide to Marketing Communication Plans

Embrace the New Media Landscape & Consumer Mindset

Advertising is “e-volving.” The digital realm is the industry’s new zip code, with companies, their consumers, and brand communities now living and thriving there. “Likes” are the new currency. Personal branding has become huge. Local celebrities are emerging, their every move followed in the Twitterverse. The blogosphere is the fast track to getting heard and staying in the know. Patrons are becoming “mayors” of their favorite hangout spots. Epinions are “calling brands out” and giving them “street cred”. Pinboards are the latest form of expression. Americans are selecting the next superstar with a simple call or text. And smartphones are tendering solutions to consumers’ every need. The Internet has made information readily available, enabled people to work, learn, and play at the touch of their fingertips. But moreover, it has allowed brands to track their consumers, interact with them, and build relationships while they do so. As a result of technology, we’re able to serve up relevant content in an instant, engage consumers in a real-time dialogue, or invite them to create a personalized version of our product. Our messages have never been more up-to-the-minute or impactful.

THE NEW CONSUMER ATTITUDE

Meanwhile, consumers’ expectations of brands have never been higher. They want and expect open communication, real-time dialogue. Smart companies have accepted this challenge and invited their audiences “into the hallowed halls”, asking them to contribute to the conversation, to express their needs and wants. There is a new level of transparency in business, with information made readily available. Audiences can now debate with brands. Befriend them. Shape them. Aspire to be them. And become a part of them. Corporations are more accessible, approachable, and responsive. In return, consumers are more naturally accepting brands as partners and as part of pop culture. The mind-set has changed. Life has changed.

THE NEW MARKETER MIND-SET

It's been called the era of transformation. What does it mean for marketers? In short, marketing mixes have become more inventive, more expansive, more involved. The investment of time and energy has never been greater. Keeping up vital interaction with consumers is no small matter. And with technology and trends changing by the minute, staying abreast of things is an ongoing challenge. Industry players actively work time into their schedules to read blogs, subscribe to e-newsletters, view podcasts, and attend webinars. Volumes of information and opportunities are there, but figuring out how to make them work for us has become the hard part. We know that we must adapt or die. Or worse, become irrelevant.

What does it mean to have Followers? How do we serve them well? If we create a Facebook page, what will make them come? Do we intentionally set out to make something viral? There are many questions that remain. One thing is for certain, though. Ads today are more creative than ever. New technology and new attitudes are helping spawn spectacular advertising. Writers and art directors are limited only by their imagination. Special effects and programming wizards can translate the dreamable into the doable. What cool stuff will we see tomorrow? Maybe today? There is no shortage of creative brainpower and technological know-how, and all it takes is to bring the two together.

ADVERTISING FROM A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PERSPECTIVE

Good advertising has always been memorable, relevant, and impactful. Beyond that, there are often differing viewpoints. For clients, the test of a good campaign is an increase in sales. For an agency, it may be the winning of a Clio or an Addy, a mention in a trade publication, or nationwide press. But the best campaigns coming out these days, the ones that both sell products and win awards, are insightful, unexpected, and that use an approach that hits target audiences on multiple touchpoints.

From a tactical standpoint, the Super Bowl remains one of the showcases for new ads and new campaigns. The advertising is so interesting, it is talked about before *and* after the game. One point of debate among ad people is whether the ads are examples of great advertising or merely good film. What is beyond debate is that the ads are usually highly entertaining. Each year seems to highlight new technology or creative techniques. Regardless of whether the ads are funny, smart, shocking, professional, or user-generated, they will get scrutinized. But some ask, "Do these ads really help sell the product?" Even though others counter that sales are not the ads' primary objective, many wonder: Has the role of advertising changed, at least for megabrands?

Discussions about an ad's effectiveness can get complicated. Effectiveness can be difficult to achieve and hard to measure. Because of the increasing sophistication of the market and the nature of the advertising task, running some of these ads requires a good measure of faith.

The public has become advertising savvy and, perhaps, a bit jaded. Not only is the public exposed to countless ads, it is also inundated with promotional messages virtually everywhere it goes—from classrooms and ball fields to the restroom at the local pub. Moreover, it's a parity marketplace, meaning many companies sell products that have no distinguishing intrinsic qualities, nothing to set them apart from the competition other than, perhaps, an image or a personality. In the top agencies, people in every discipline are continually challenged to think creatively to produce advertising that is better and more creative than earlier work—not to mention that of the competition. Writers, art directors, media planners, sales promotion experts, and all others are encouraged to think “out of the box,” or to be “disruptive.” There's a lot of pressure, but when the pieces all come together in the right way, the feeling is exhilarating. The last thing great ad people want to be is mediocre or dull. They want to be groundbreaking.

Truly creative work often exists at the edges of common thinking. The more common the ideas, the less creative or different the work. Creative thinking involves expanding, contracting, or reshaping the boundaries of the way people normally think. Creative work often reflects insights into human behavior, nature, or current society and relates them to the product in a fresh way. The important thing is to be fresh while relevant. Different while accessible. Maybe even original. If people expect one thing, surprise them with another. The forces that lead to creative thinking may produce advertising that is entertaining, but not necessarily ads that sell. Among management, similar thinking often leads to changes in philosophy or procedures. As businesses and markets evolve, changes are inevitable. But the changes may not be for the better. ROI, MBO, TQM, IMC, CRM, EVA, SVA, reengineering, disruption, and under-the-radar are only some of the ideas that have changed the lexicon in the marketing and advertising business. It's likely that some of these concepts do not hold as much promise today as when they were first introduced (or do they?). It's great to be an instrument of change. But for most people, it's enough to be able to evaluate change, to figure out what works, what doesn't—how to survive and thrive in a changing environment. Evaluating change can be as difficult as anticipating change. Telling people how to evaluate and anticipate change can be almost as difficult as bringing about change—but we do have a few suggestions.

■ PROCESS ORIENTATION

Lines are certainly blurring and flexibility is definitely key. So it might seem odd to mention that it can often be helpful to think about change as something that occurs within a **process**—that occurs over time, usually involving many steps. But a good manager **adapts to change** by learning what those steps are and how they interrelate. Otherwise, if you merely concentrate your attention on producing end results, such as an ad, you may wind up seeing what you want to see or believing what you would like to believe about the ad's likely success. And if you pay scant attention to *how* you get results, as markets change, you may not be flexible enough

to keep up. Instead, by understanding how all the parts in a process interrelate, when the environment changes, you can better manage change. Whether your understanding is rigorously analytical or based on intuition, when change comes you can better anticipate it, evaluate it, and be an agent for it.

In developed markets, changes have become so widespread and massive that they appear to be coming from all directions simultaneously. Still, there is often an underlying order in even the most complex situations. What makes change so difficult to manage in today's sophisticated market, as opposed to a textbook, is that the process is *circular*. In textbooks, the steps in a process often occur along a linear time line, so that a campaign might have a beginning and an end. In a dynamic market, especially one characterized by massive change, conclusions and decisions have to be reevaluated seemingly all the time. Markets today change far more quickly than they did as little as 10 or 15 years ago. We think the steps in the campaign process should be viewed as taking place along a spiral path rather than a straight line. This means that by the time you finish analyzing background information and make decisions, it is often time to gather more information and do more analysis. Viewed this way, the campaign development process strives for continuous improvement. We recommend that you think of the campaign as an evolving work, even though for some people (say, students), the process must have a beginning and an end.

We've organized this book as follows:

- Chapter 1 stresses the perspective needed to develop and execute a compelling communication campaign in today's marketplace.
- Chapter 2 assesses clients' business needs and introduces tools for identifying consumer target segments.
- Chapter 3 examines the marketplace, product offerings, and the competitive landscape.
- Chapter 4 explains turning problems and opportunities into campaign objectives.
- Chapter 5 covers the direction and development of a marketing strategy.
- Chapter 6 addresses message direction, explores a variety of creative approaches and introduces the "campaign concept".
- Chapter 7 explores a variety of brainstorming techniques that can lead to a campaign direction.
- Chapter 8 speaks to the multi discipline/tactical mix involved in today's campaigns.
- Chapter 9 delves into the development of a media plan, including objectives and strategies.
- Chapter 10 discusses how to evaluate a campaign.
- Chapter 11 illustrates the way to put together a comprehensive plans book.
- Chapter 12 focuses on various ways to put together a winning presentation.

Critical to the understanding of this book is the knowledge that each of these chapters is inextricably linked together in what we call the **campaign process**. The purpose of this process is to develop a

marketing communication plan. This plan outlines the activities, ideas, and executions that take place in order to achieve campaign objectives. In marketing plans, objectives are usually defined in terms of sales or market share. In an advertising plan, the goals may be the same or the objectives may be set in terms of communication criteria, such as awareness or image. The best plans are strategic in nature, but it doesn't necessarily follow that all plans are strategic. Plans, like strategy, usually take place over an extended period.

DEVELOPING STRATEGY WITHIN THE PROCESS

Generally, the objective of strategy is to give the company a competitive advantage. Strategy helps keep everyone involved with developing the campaign working toward the same idea and true to the same brand voice. The key to strategic thinking involves anticipating consumer and competitive responses to a variety of alternative actions and planning accordingly. Strategic thinkers plan for the current time frame and *at least* the foreseeable future. So, a plan that focuses on price deals or coupon offerings is not particularly strategic because most of its effect is likely to be felt in the short term. On the other hand, an effort to improve or strengthen the image of a brand is likely to have a much more lasting effect. Strategic plans consist of actions that tend to be general in nature as opposed to tactics that are more specific. Another key to effective strategy is to devise a plan that integrates all the activities, ideas, and executions so that they are directed toward achieving common goals. In an integrated plan, the effect of all the actions taken together is greater than the sum of the individual parts. To develop such a plan, think of the campaign as a series of steps or operations, focusing on the interrelationship of the various elements. This is what we call **process orientation**.

OPPORTUNITY AND THE COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

The field of advertising is in a state of continuous change. A troubling economy, rapidly changing technology, constantly evolving business models, and new media put pressure on people to change the way they conduct business. Over the last decade, corporations tightened their belts through layoffs and other staff reductions to operate leaner and, some would say, meaner. And budget cuts have taken their toll on agency in-house development initiatives, such as workshops and seminar series, once often required by many agencies for promotion. The downsizing of the last decade and a slow economy following the turn of the century has resulted in a sizable opportunity for beginners to advance their advertising careers. The traditional progression of junior executives coming up through the ranks into middle management positions no longer works as it did in the past. As a result, there is greater opportunity for people who come in with an already clear understanding of the way things really work.

However, advertising operations, whether in an agency or in a department, are relatively small businesses. Opportunities to learn on the job in

an informal or formal training program are much fewer today than they used to be. New hires, especially recent graduates, need a solid conceptual understanding of the advertising process—from day one. Procedures and techniques—the kinds of knowledge students often learn through internships—are less important in a dynamic, changing market. Learning the way things are done today is no guarantee the same procedures will be used next year. People in the forefront of this new era understand that the changes taking place in business are more a function of new attitudes and new ways of looking at advertising than a result of new hardware, emerging technology, or new media.

Yet for many brands, the business and its purpose are fundamentally the same as they were a decade ago. This book strives not only to provide a transition between new and more traditional ways of thinking but also to indicate where a traditional approach is still valid. Over the years, advertising practitioners have referred to our industry as a *problem-solving* business. Typically, the problem involves selling a product, a service, or an idea. Very often these problems are solved through an advertising campaign. Today, marketers are looked at as not only problem solvers but also as *community builders*. They are increasingly aware of the full range of promotional tools from which to choose: from advertising and public relations to sales promotion, social media, infomercials, partnerships, product placement, and event marketing, and they use them in concert with one another to build strong brands and lasting relationships with consumers. This book has been titled *Advertising Campaign Strategy* more out of a sense of tradition than as a reflection of the view that advertising can or should be prepared apart from other types of marketing communication. Consumers tend to view all contacts they have with promotion elements as advertising. *From our perspective, advertising is simply one of the various marketing communication tools businesses use to get their messages to consumers.*

Advertising is, of course, a business. Practitioners are keenly aware of this fact; their customers, clients, and business associates seldom let them forget it. Intellectually, students and people starting out in advertising are aware that advertising is a business, but their lack of work experience sometimes causes them to lose sight of this fact. Some may even think of advertising as an art—a kind of applied art. Professionals understand that there is an art to using advertising creatively, but it is still a business, an important tool of marketing. Its usual goal is to help sell products and services. This book, and particularly this chapter, looks at how advertising interrelates with other aspects of marketing. The challenge to the student of advertising is to reconcile the differences between any new advertising practices or thinking and the principles and procedures that have proven effective over a period of years.

THE NEW MARKETING ENVIRONMENT

To fully appreciate how advertising can solve problems, it is helpful to understand the relationship of advertising to other activities in a marketing program. As many authors have noted, to sell a product effectively,

the 4P's of marketing must be perfectly aligned. It must be the right *product*, at the right *price*, at the right *place*, and with the right *promotion*. Each element must be in harmony with the others. Some marketers are now including “people” as its own “P” in the marketing mix—that is, the development and cultivation of relationships with carefully identified audiences. Admittedly, this isn't really different than the “marketing concept” where company decisions are made with consumers in mind. However, adding to the “P-list” helps keep an emphasis on consumers more top of mind.

The marketing environment has changed quite a bit during the past decade. The forecast for the immediate future: *more change*. To be effective in this new environment, a planner needs to reevaluate exactly what it means to have the right product, price, place, or promotion. To be successful, a company should strive to gain a competitive edge. The alternative is to simply “get by”—which in today's business environment is an invitation for a company to get “passed by.” The reality of the marketplace is that even when the elements may not be quite “right,” the company still has to figure out a way to capitalize on what it is doing right, or it will be forced out of business.

THE RIGHT PRODUCT

Getting this piece of the marketing mix right has become increasingly more complicated in recent years. At a time when different product and size introductions are on the rise, retailers are trying to streamline operations to get a better grasp on the profitability of everything they sell to improve the bottom line. Scanner data systems allow managers to assess the movement of every product variation, or stockkeeping unit (SKU), in a store. But getting the right product to the store requires an understanding of how consumers and the marketplace are changing.

Traditionally, marketing-oriented companies either asked consumers what they wanted or drew an inference from their behavior. Today, when researchers ask consumers what they want, consumers often don't know. Products in many generic categories have become so sophisticated that they do at least a fair job of satisfying consumers' needs or wants. Because it is often easier for consumers to focus on what they feel they lack rather than on what they want, researchers usually get more information if they ask consumers about their gripes or complaints. So researchers are focusing less on consumers' needs and wants and more on their dissatisfactions with current choices.

As consumers become more sophisticated, they seem to be making more decisions based on microissues. About 10 or 15 years ago, car manufacturers seemed ambivalent about where consumers set cups or cans in an automobile. Today, this feature often receives prominent attention in automobile ads, whether the car is inexpensive or pricey. Today, researchers and developers focus hard on consumers' concerns, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. In the insurance industry, consumers have always bemoaned having to pay a deductible when an auto accident occurs. Enter, Nationwide's World's Greatest Spokesperson campaign and

the concept of a vanishing deductible, which reduces consumers' deductibles every year that they're a safe driver. Simple, but genius. Problem. Solution. Consumers' cries were heard and their good behavior rewarded.

Many consumers report they do not have any problems. When this happens, researchers often shift the focus from consumers' issues to their interests. It's perhaps a sign of relative affluence, but today consumers buy many products not because they want or need them nor because they help them solve problems. Instead, consumers will sometimes buy something even though their interest is minimal. Many consumers are recreational shoppers. If researchers can't find any interests worth promoting, advertisers may try to build psychological value into a product by developing a personality or brand image for the product. For example, Tommy Hilfiger promotes itself as eclectic, preppy athleticism, Ralph Lauren encourages an image of American luxury and sophistication, and Calvin Klein pursues an edgy, minimalism.

However, regardless of the category, the "big" product ideas (e.g., iPod[®], Kindle[®], Nike Fuel, and the advent of smartphones) are often the result of combining a knowledge of an industry or technology with an "intuitive" understanding of consumers to create a great leap forward in a single step.

THE RIGHT PRICE

Increasingly, the right price seems to mean the right lower price. The success of Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Target, and other mass-merchandise retailers continues to exert downward pressure on prices as value-conscious consumers patronize low-price retailers in ever-increasing numbers. Brand-name manufacturers are no longer able to dictate to retailers suggested retail prices. Eastman Kodak, for example, tried suggesting a "minimum advertised price" (MAP) on its premium-priced Royal Gold film, backing it with dealer rebates for all vendors who held the line on the MAP. The idea was to build a generous margin into the price of each roll of film and thus encourage retailers to do more in-store promotions of Kodak film. However, Wal-Mart disregarded the MAP, gave up the dealer rebate, and priced the product lower than the suggested retail price.¹ Wal-Mart competes on the basis of low prices—and competes very well. In the new marketing environment, there seems little companies can do to stem a retailer's inclination to operate on narrow profit margins.

A landmark date in the trend toward operating on a narrower price margin occurred in the spring of 1993. Philip Morris, the consumer products giant, put a 40-cents-per-pack price cut on its full-price brands of cigarettes. By doing so, the company tacitly acknowledged that the consumer trend toward craving lower prices was here to stay. On what some observers refer to as Marlboro Friday, the response on Wall Street was a drop in the share prices of many consumer product companies, from Procter & Gamble and Sara Lee to Coca-Cola and General Mills. Traders seemed to be saying that if Philip Morris could not maintain its price margins with Marlboro, the number-one brand in the world at the

time, then other consumer product companies would also be vulnerable. Today, companies continue to relentlessly pursue cost-cutting measures.

Small, independent bookstores have long lamented the influx of retail giants like Borders and Barnes and Noble driving down the price of books. But more recently, even these large traditional booksellers got a taste of their own medicine when Wal-Mart and Target entered the book wars and lowered the price of top sellers to \$10 (Wal-Mart)...then \$8.99 (Target)...then \$8.98 (Wal-Mart). Amazon.com and other online retailers also entered the scene with a vengeance, offering consumers the option of both new *and* used books at price points even lower than the big boxes. What's more, these virtual sellers offered the simplicity of keyword searches and the delivery of media straight to consumers' doorsteps, and all with the click of a mouse. The price war and the ability of digital companies (who have less overhead and more inventory capacity) to undercut bricks and mortar retail establishments is what drove Borders out of business. Ultimately, businesses who are more nimble and who can adapt to changing times are those who will survive and thrive.

THE RIGHT PLACE

A revolution in the marketplace has also affected the way marketers view strategies of place—the right place. An aggressively competitive marketplace has led many companies to get the product to the consumer in ways that would not have been considered in earlier times. McDonald's, long a staunch advocate of the freestanding store, now places restaurants in gas stations, convenience stores, universities, hospitals, and other non-traditional locations. Consumer product companies are also steadily losing control over decisions within the channel of distribution to the giant retailers. Wal-Mart is legendary for exacting stringent requirements on its suppliers regarding inventory control and shelf facings.

Many companies are also opting to market their products directly to consumers. With the increasing ease and widespread use of computers in business, many companies are amassing sizable databases that enable them to target narrowly defined consumers with a minimum of waste.

Although the Sears general merchandise catalogue is dead, most retailers—from Abercrombie & Fitch to Wal-Mart—supplement their in-store sales with catalogue and/or online sales. That said, the location of where a product is sold can still communicate volumes about a brand's image and quality. A pair of "Ray Ban" sunglasses sold at a flea market is perceived much differently than a pair of Ray Ban's sold at a Sunglass Hut.

Today, with the advent of e-tailers, all kinds of products are sold over the Internet. Even groceries are sold on the Web, with online grocers like Peapod, NetGrocer, EthnicGrocer, and Safeway vying for virtual customers. Some may question how many consumers will really pay extra to have their groceries delivered. (It's merely a matter of time and habits; many already do for pizza.)