

14.18: Marketing Communication Program (SMART)

Learning Objectives

- Outline the steps involved in the creation of a marketing communication program (SMART)

As you consider your advertising and promotion plan, it's important to keep three (3) things in-mind:

1. How can we maximize coverage, given budgets?
2. What channels will be the most effective?
3. How will we assess campaign performance?

The first should be self-evident. While there may be temptation to match the proliferation of channels with an effort to be present in each, there is a finite limit to what organizations can and should invest in their marketing activity, given their strategy, resources and the competitive environment. Considering the costs of developing content and securing access in each channel, it would be incredibly expensive to run campaigns in all channels.

Further, being present in every channel may lead to diminishing returns. It's rarely possible and seldom advisable to spread messages across all channels, knowing that the increased reach will likely mean sacrificing frequency and the need for multiple impressions. Consider the question we posed earlier, "Was each ad beneficial, or did some get 'tuned out' because the consumer had already decided that the product was right for them?"

Think about it this way. If a marketer messages on its website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, then pays for banner ads, billboards, print ads in magazines and television commercials, the message has incredible reach and assumed frequency, likely generating high impressions. What would the further benefit be of incorporating radio into the campaign? What if we messaged on Instagram or added paid search? Would this be duplicative to the television activity? Or, would it be complementary?

One way to answer the question is to think of the second question. That is, examine the Customer Journey to understand how consumers shop the product or service and how the channels function to deliver information. In what channels are the target consumers present and engaged? What are their explicit needs at given contact points and in each channel. How does the channel meet a shopper's needs for information or support? Instead of spreading marketing investments across all channels, like spreading peanut butter across a slice of bread, most marketers will "over-invest" in specific channels, selecting the ones that provide the greatest benefit. This could mean the widest audience, the highest level of interaction, the best fit with the specific target market or another criterion.

For example, if you're responsible for a well-known brand that generates organic, i.e. natural, web traffic to your own site, it may mean paid search is less important for you. But, this also means that SEO is critically important, so that your site ranks well and shoppers can find what they're looking for.

Or, if you find that a high percentage of your followers on social media are prospects, it might be worthwhile to invest in creative and messaging there. (By some estimates, existing customers outnumber prospects on social media by 4:1. However, that also means that 20% of followers are prospective customers—that shouldn't be overlooked.)

If your product/ service is complex or highly visual, you might want to consider how best to share details with your target. If complex, would a magazine ad work well? What about blogs or video blogs where influencers describe the product and benefits?

If it's a visual item, would you ever consider radio? Or, would print work best?

And, of course, we need to determine how best to measure the effectiveness of the campaign, i.e. the messaging, channels and impact on consumers. Like allocating a budget, the determination of a campaign's performance is specific to the firm's strategy, resources and the competitive environment. For example, if an organization is launching a new product or service, their priority might be upon building initial consumer awareness and trial. We see this commonly in the grocery industry, when new and seasonal items are featured in advertising and in-store merchandising, e.g. Oui™ French style yogurt by Yoplait® and Hershey's® Gold caramel crème candy bar.

Now, compare this to our evaluation of The Coca-Cola Company. In them we saw a dominant, global brand advertising products with widespread distribution and consumption. Clearly, they aren't trying to develop awareness and trial. More likely, in this case, they're advertising to reinforce the emotional benefits of drinking the beverage to support brand affinity and to keep it "top of mind." These goals are much different than what's in play for a firm supporting new items or services.

Alternatively, advertising can be a useful tool, if the brand equity has been impaired– if a firm has suffered a public relations issue. In this case, the intent of the marketing activity might be to improve customer perception. After their well-publicized account fraud scandal brought about by the creation of millions of fraudulent savings and checking accounts without customer consent, Wells Fargo has initiated an advertising campaign to “Earn back your trust.” Clearly, these messages are aimed at restoring confidence in the brand and organization, following the scandal and resulting \$185 million in fines & penalties.

Regardless of the motivation for or objectives of the advertising campaign, marketers should be guided by the [mnemonic acronym](#) SMART. Independent of the specific goals, i.e. reach, impressions, brand awareness or other measures, SMART gives criteria to guide in the setting of objectives. The letters S and M usually mean specific and measurable. Possibly the most common version has the remaining letters referring to achievable, relevant and time-bound.

SMART was introduced in a paper by T. Doran called *There’s a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management’s goals and objectives*. Subsequent authors have adjusted their meaning slightly to:

- Specific, i.e. targeting a specific area for improvement.
- Measurable, i.e. quantifiable or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
- Achievable, i.e. realistically be achievable, given available resources.
- Relevant, i.e. applicable to the current objective and supportive of the broader strategy
- Time-bound, i.e. specific to a given period when the result(s) can/ should be achieved

It’s important to apply these criteria to assessment of the campaign. Without them and clear understanding of the scope, it becomes too difficult to understand the impact of the marketing activity. For example, without a specific objective, is customer awareness more important or sales (as an indicator of trial)? If there aren’t measures or the objectives aren’t actionable, can we accurately assess correlation or causation? By the same token, if the objectives aren’t realistic, do we get an incorrect impression of the marketing activity’s impact for good or for bad? And, if not time-bound, will we know how quickly to make adjustments to our plan to improve return?

Thus, it’s important to keep three things in-mind, when building an advertising and promotion plan:

1. How can we maximize coverage, given budgets?
2. What channels will be the most effective?
3. How will we assess campaign performance?

Avoid the temptation to match the proliferation of channels with an effort to be present in each, given the costs of development and the risk of diminishing returns. Examine the Customer Journey to understand how consumers shop the product or service and how the channels function to deliver information. Apply the SMART criteria to assess the campaign objectives to manage scope and to understand impact.

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