



IN TODAY'S AGE OF SHRINKING BUDGETS AND RAPIDLY MULTIPLYING MEDIA CHOICES, IT'S HARD TO GENERATE MAXIMUM IMPACT FROM ADVERTISING EFFORTS. AS DIFFICULT AS GENERATING IMPACT MAY BE, IT'S HELPFUL TO NOTE THAT ADHERENCE TO SOME BEST PRACTICES CAN MAKE LIMITED DOLLARS GO A LONG WAY.

For starters, advertisers must clearly identify their target audience. Vague definitions of a core target lead to broad media buys. Broad media buys lead to wasted advertising impressions. With limited resources, wasted impressions must be minimized. The best way to eliminate waste is to tightly define the core target prospect.

After identifying the prospect, care must be taken to deeply understand their media behaviors. Obtaining deep understanding is not a simple exercise. For large marketers, primary research studies may be commissioned or extensive secondary research may be available via subscription. Smaller associations may not have these capabilities.

TARGETING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Fear not. If your budget is not expansive enough to obtain market research, there are simple things that can be done to paint an accurate, useful picture of target consumer or member behavior.

First, much Internet research is available. Marketers can subscribe to *Media Post*, *Ad Age* or *Media Week* online. Each service provides numerous weekly reports on behaviors and new research concerning various targets.

Second, use available communication tools — such as newsletters and polls — to obtain direct feedback from target

prospects. If those communication tools are not available, try low-cost alternatives like a simple pizza party around a conference table. Invite different groups of target members during a number of lunch hours and sharpen your pencil.

Third, leverage relationships with others. Media vendors or non-competing partners may have access to useful information. Try to secure as much understanding as you can from resources they can provide.

When you have information in hand, put yourself in your target's shoes to understand what their life is like. Create a "Week in the Life" analysis reflecting their activities and behaviors. Make an honest effort to get a feel for the things that happen to them across the hours of their day.

A complete Week in the Life analysis will show patterns of behavior. Relevant media contact points will emerge from the profile. Identify which contact points are most appropriate for carrying your message. Do not attempt to force-fit media that do not echo consumer or member behavior as this leads to wasted impressions.

When the best media contact points have been identified, the best media properties pertinent to those points will become evident. It is not yet time to make a media investment. Serious strategic questions must first be asked.

USING A TARGETED APPROACH

First, beware the old rule of thumb that suggests casting a wide net. A wide net is great when building awareness is important and resources are sizable. Most marketers don't have buckets of resources. In that case, make sure to follow the target audience rule: Be focused.

In 2003, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida faced a situation where limited resources were a consideration. There was an annual need to announce to health care program decision-makers what BCBSFL had to offer for the coming year. Not only was awareness of new benefits important, but at year-end, many companies would be drawing close to the end of current contracts, providing opportunity for Blue Cross.

For many consecutive years, BCBSFL attacked the market with a few television

spots explaining as many benefits as a 30-second ad would allow. Production expense for three ads didn't leave resources for significant air time, and broad television exposure barely reached health care program decision makers.

A new approach was suggested in 2003. A dual DVD and micro-site was created that explained the full breadth of new BCBSFL offerings in a way friendly to benefits managers. DVDs were inserted on a specific day into local business magazines or newspaper business sections. The micro-site was activated as well.

Simple 15-second television spots were created and targeted specifically to benefits managers directing them to the DVD inserted in the paper. The use of 15-second spots and simple creative allowed for more media to be purchased in support of the effort. Benefits managers responded, contacting BCBSFL in larger numbers than past years.

TACTICS FOR INCREASING IMPACT

When opportunistic media properties are identified, rank them from most to least valuable. Start with the best-value prop-

erty and focus resources to create impact in it. Don't fund the second property until you're confident the first will work. Then fund the second and so on until resources run out.

When negotiating, there also are things you can do to increase impact with limited resources. Try these tactics:

- **Leverage scale.** Consolidate dollars behind one or one ownership group of properties to provide better negotiating leverage. Greater levels of dollars behind one or few properties can be

used to secure frequency discounts and merchandising benefits from vendors.

- **Procure remnant or fire sale space.** Most media properties will frequently encounter situations where they cannot sell their entire inventory. Sometimes, buyers return inventory that can't be used at the last minute. In those cases, the vendor would rather sell inventory at even a greatly reduced cost to capture some revenue than to have the inventory go unsold. If you have a good relationship and

prior arrangements with the vendor, they may contact you with last-minute inventory opportunities where good placement can be obtained for a fraction of the cost.

- **Enter into cooperative agreements with others.** In cooperative arrangements, both brands target the same consumer prospects, pool resources, run an advertising message beneficial to both and double their media exposure. Pooled resources may also open the door for scale discounts that might not have been available to either brand individually.
- **Ask for "no charge units."** Consequential buys give the advertiser latitude to request not only merchandising benefits, but additional media as well. This may take the form of an incremental print ad or broadcast units running in an off-time period. Sometimes, a vendor may have a partner property, similarly targeted to desired prospects, in which they will provide additional media. This can have value in broadening the reach of your effort.
- **Try barter or trade.** Does your organization have goods or services to offer in lieu of cash payment for advertising space? Perhaps another organization has donated a significant quantity of tickets, hard goods or property. Surprisingly, some media outlets will occasionally provide equivalent cash value of media space for goods and services.

Limited resources may create obstacles, but marketers can overcome them by using best practices. Focus on core target consumers or members. Dive deep and really understand their behaviors to identify best media opportunities. Finally, employ smart negotiating tactics to create the best possible impact with available resources. 

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