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The Little Things Can Mean So Much

Don't Underestimate the Worth of Value-Added Elements-They Could Make Your Good Promotion Even Better

By Mark Dominiak

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Planners can do any of a number of small things when creating or executing media plans that can contribute significantly to the overall marketing plan.

Sometimes, however, those small things receive little attention or are left on the table simply because they don't appear on the surface to be worth the effort. Value-added elements are one of those small things that should not be lightly dismissed.

Here's a recent case study involving T.J. Maloney's Authentic Irish Pub, a client opening its first location outside of Chicago, in northwest Indiana, that made use of value-added elements to add incremental impact to the brand's overall marketing effort: T.J.

Maloney's offers an authentic Irish experience and plenty of craic. (Craic, for the uninitiated, is an Irish expression used to convey a fun, social and energized atmosphere.)

The media planning situation was to provide support for the grand opening in a short time frame. Media resources were modest, but there was still a need to generate big awareness quickly, hopefully driving healthy traffic for the opening. Resources were deep enough to afford four to five weeks of local broadcast and print at reasonable levels.

But even with some broadcast and print, there were still communication needs left unaddressed. For example, the base plan couldn't provide enough time or space to cover with depth every copy point important to the opening. Things like menu specifics, live entertainment schedules, a call to action and reasons to visit were not able to be mentioned in detail, if at all.

There was also the challenge to include more contact points using other marketing elements, such as public relations, promotions, interactive, grassroots word of mouth and pub events. These added elements could also provide incremental awareness and additional reasons to stop by T.J. Maloney's. Without deeper resources, the strength of these contact points could not be mined.

That's where value-added became a powerful tool. As part of the buy negotiation, we approached our media partners and requested that value-added elements be included as part of the buy arrangement. The intent was to request additional elements outright or in exchange for non-cash items that could provide value for the media partner and potentially be used as incentives for target consumers.

PR was created by securing station drops of gift packages that generated good will and on-air conversation by station talent. It may seem small, but this type of on-air commentary is in effect an endorsement from a trusted source that makes a visit more likely. If my favorite DJ is raving about this place, maybe I should give it a try.

Web links were an important element to secure. They gave consumers the ability to obtain info that couldn't be completely included in other media communications: dining and drink menus, party room amenities and a complete entertainment schedule. Interaction with the T.J. Maloney's Web site also delivers a deeper brand experience—stories, essence, look and feel.

Promotions were also secured primarily in exchange for non-cash goods that would be used as part of the promotion. Those goods translated into additional on-air mentions or column inches, which can stimulate pub traffic or, if attached to talent appearances at the pub, provide another reason for consumers to drop by.

Recipe for Success

Successful use of value-added elements requires only two things. First, the planning team must elect to include them as a tactic. It's surprising how many times planners either forget to pursue value-added elements or simply choose not to invest effort in pursuing them.

Second, fight the urge to look at value-added elements as just incremental inventory to be negotiated. On how many occasions have your plans requested that bonus units be spun into packages or extra one-third-column units added to the magazine buy?

This orientation undermines the potential impact value-added elements can bring to a plan. The buy itself likely supplies a healthy level of impressions to target consumers. Value-added elements bring new messaging contact points into the plan that provide incremental prompting to consumers to engage with the brand at a deeper level.

When additional contact points are created, consumers are presented with opportunities to better internalize brand messages. That's valuable because additional contact channels may tap into a portion of the consumer's cognitive process that has yet to be engaged by the lion's share of the plan's impressions. When a consumer can be prompted to consider the brand just a little more deeply, the odds of that consumer responding favorably in the marketplace increase.

Creating a Strategy

Once the planning team has chosen to pursue value-added elements as part of the plan, a few simple things can be done to identify fertile value-added areas.

- Reacquaint with marketing objectives.
- Review consumer behaviors.
- Understand media partner assets.

What does the marketing plan aim to achieve with consumers? At the end of the day, most marketing efforts seek to secure a response from consumers. That response may be a visit, a reply or a sale.

But most messages today are far from hard-sell. While many messages call for consumers to come in or buy now, much of the time ads simply generate awareness that the marketer hopes will lead to consumer consideration and sale.

The value-added question is simply this: What can additional media elements do to push consumers a little bit further down the road to a visit or sale? When planning strategy is being established, planners should assign a specific task to value-added elements. As vendors submit value-added ideas for consideration, planners should not accept ideas that do not live up to the specific task expected of those elements.

Consumer Behavior

There are two things to consider.

First, go back to the consumer's purchase process for the brand or category being planned. For whichever media type is being considered, get a sense for when that medium intersects with the purchase process, then ask what the next step is in the purchase process. What can the vendor provide as a value-added element to prompt consumers one step further down the purchase path?

As the cliché goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." It may sometimes be that the main portion of the media buy brings consumers to the watering hole and the value-added secured as part of the negotiation provides just the nudge needed to prompt a sip.

Second, think about the breadth of media behaviors typical of target consumers. Which media behaviors was the budgeted portion of the plan unable to fund? Which of those behaviors was next on the priority list to receive funding? Try to secure value-added elements that provide those unfunded behavioral contact points with consumers.

The point is to maximize the breadth of contact points that the media plan provides for messaging. Providing more places for a creative message to connect with a consumer increases the chance that consumers will act in the marketplace.

Media Partner Assets

Consider which other assets media partners have available for the brand beyond what is being purchased. Those assets can be either media or nonmedia in nature. Perhaps a property has Web or print extensions or offers traveling tours or shows, event-based programs or even access to popular talent.

It's also possible that the media partner has nonmedia assets such as production capability, hard goods or relationships to other media or corporate partners that may have value to the brand. Obtaining these types of assets from media partners as value-added could mean resources originally earmarked to purchase these items might be redirected to purchase of additional media or other marketing contact elements.

Value-Added Helps

T.J. Maloney's is a great example of value-added elements contributing positively to the media plan. Even as a new player entering a big marketplace with a modest budget, the value-added elements helped T.J. Maloney's blow the doors off for its grand opening weekend. That so many customers were able to come in and experience some good old Irish craic bodes well for T.J. Maloney's ability to carve out a special niche in the market.

Value-added doesn't help only brands with a modest budget. In another example, a past e-commerce client procured value-added "pro-mercials" in lieu of bonus units as part of local television buys. Those pro-mercials provided deeper information about brand benefits and directed consumers to station Web sites to learn more. Links were established from station sites to our brand's site, stimulating brand experience and registration. Marketplace response to the campaign was so positive the brand sold itself to a national category leader for far more than imagined in the client's wildest business plan expectations.

Value-added elements aren't intended by themselves to create huge impact in the marketplace. They are enhancements to plans or buys that take commitment, time and effort to implement. Yet such enhancements are sometimes the final nudge that consumers need to take action in the marketplace.

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