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## Good Things Come in Small Packages

Implement a Series of Baby Steps to Meet Larger Goals, Leave More Decisions to Junior Team Members

By Mark Dominiak

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Sometimes the best approach to implementing change is to take one step at a time.

The concept of achieving goals by breaking down large efforts into small steps is not new. That idea is often referred to as Small Wins. You don't need to dig too far to find many good sources on the topic; Search for the words "Small Wins" on Google and you'll get about 30 million results to peruse.

Two very useful resources I've found to get acquainted with the power of the Small Wins concept are the books "The Leadership Challenge" by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner and "Better Together: Restoring the American Community" by Robert D.

Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein. In "The Leadership Challenge," there's a whole chapter devoted to Small Wins and, while not covered specifically in "Better Together," it's easy to see how the concept is critical to the success of the case studies covered.

The strength of Small Wins is not just its efficacy in helping to achieve larger goals or solve onerous problems. The real strength flows from its ability over time to change the behaviors and outlook of the players involved in implementing the Small Wins.

In the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, people will be much more likely to invest effort behind a smaller end that appears more achievable in the short term. Upon successfully achieving that smaller end, attempting the next small endeavor doesn't appear so daunting and generally is addressed with a bit more vigor.

When Small Wins are executed appropriately, leaders can put more of the decision-making in the hands of junior people. If the steps being taken are smaller ones, it is less risky to entrust the direction and fulfillment of those steps to other members of the team. If the junior team members are more involved in the decision-making and execution, they are more vested in the process and become more committed to reaching future goals. They also become more empowered as each step is achieved.

Each successive step becomes increasingly realistic and is attacked with greater energy until the initially daunting problem is solved. Stakeholders involved in the process not only feel good about what they have achieved, but begin to realize how capable they truly are in the face of difficult circumstances. That paradigm shift serves individuals and teams well as they turn their attention to meeting new challenges.

So you may be thinking that the notion of Small Wins sounds interesting and may have practical applications in the real world, but how does it apply to media planning? Following are three practical applications of the concept to put into your planner's toolbox.

- Breaking down clients who are resistant to change
- Tackling big planning challenges
- Preparing for change via experimentation

## **Resistant Clients**

We have all been in situations where the clients we interact with on a brand are particularly stubborn when it comes to embracing new ideas or changing circumstances. Not only does the situation become difficult to manage from a relationship perspective, it also does a disservice to the brand that is trying to make headway in the marketplace.

Employing Small Wins can help to break the situational logjam in two ways.

First, the client will be more likely to embrace a small change in a plan more than a complete change of direction. There is less risk inherent in, say, one new line item on the bottom of the flowchart than in the elimination or major change to the "security blanket" line items the client is used to seeing. Further, if measurements and accountabilities can be attached to the new line item, when goals are achieved with that line item, it will be easier to convince the client to accept more changes in subsequent plan recommendations.

Second, it's easier to convince internal teams to invest effort behind one new line item in a plan than to convince them to organize an entire new plan to present to a stubborn client.

If the client approves the line item, we were able to sell in a little something new; plus, if the client kills the idea, it's not a big loss because the team didn't put a ton of effort into it.

On the premise that the small ideas can be sold, over time they have the chance of demonstrating to the client the validity of new ideas and can potentially lead to better planning directions for the brand in the future.

## Big Challenges

Planners are frequently presented with planning challenges that are hard to tackle. It may be that the planning challenge is extremely complex or that what the brand needs to accomplish in the marketplace is fairly large. At those times, the Small Wins strategy may be very useful.

Complex planning challenges are tailor-made for a Small Wins approach. It is a realistic strategy to break down complex challenges into simpler pieces that can then be handled by implementing small plan solutions. Further, those smaller solutions can be entrusted to junior planners who can be made to understand the role and importance of their piece in the larger planning effort. Not only can the smaller pieces be delegated to fit the capabilities of junior planners, but, upon completion of those pieces and the larger plan, the junior team members can feel they made a significant contribution to the overall effort.

Large marketplace endeavors work similarly, but instead of breaking the challenge into small pieces to be executed concurrently, the larger effort may take the form of small steps executed consecutively. Each small effort would build to the larger whole in achieving the brand's end need.

## Experimentation

Knowing that change is inevitable, there will come a time when circumstances require a brand's media plan to step up to a new level. As a planner, you can either wait for that to occur-trying to solve problems on the fly-or you can try to do something proactive about it.

Not knowing in advance what changes may happen, one solution is to apply the concept of Small Wins to media plans and always include a number of forward-looking experimental elements.

These small experiments can be very beneficial. They give planners ongoing feedback on how potential new elements may work for their brands. In the event that changing circumstances lessen the productivity of the current plan, experimental elements that have started to prove their worth can be rotated in to address those issues with confidence that the solution can have immediate impact.

Plans that haven't employed experimental elements do not have those Small Wins to fall back on and thereby face more risk in the tactical choices they make to address changing circumstances.

One way to wrap your mind around this concept in action is to watch how the networks experiment with programming. Amid all of the tentpole shows on a schedule, the networks will slot in new programming at the beginning of the year and rotate in replacement programs at midseason to try to find more tentpoles to bolster schedules as viewers' tastes change.

The success of "My Name Is Earl" and "The Office" on Tuesdays proved to be a Small Win for NBC that may enable the network to regain some of that bygone Must See TV magic when both shows are moved to Thursday in January.

Media plan experiments can take a variety of forms. From a television perspective, it may mean expanding the mix to include dayparts that have not been used before. It might also mean trying syndication or a cable network that hasn't been tried before.

On a really small experimental scale, it could mean trying out these changes in one or two local markets, perhaps with a different creative message or including some response component to monitor how the marketplace reacts to the new elements. Or it could mean looking at the possibilities offered by satellite, digital or interactive television.

So as 2006 rushes up on the horizon, keep the notion of Small Wins in your toolbox. You never know when a particularly thorny planning problem may rear its ugly head. If one does crop up, you may be pleased to know that the best solution is the one in the Small Wins package.

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