

Secondary Messaging: an argument is not a confession...

Effective messaging enables your advocates...

Marketing managers know enough to use different media to send different primary messages to different audiences (e.g. WSJ - the paper edition - for execs and eWeek - the online edition - for IT staff), but they still don't always seem to grasp the importance of helping these decision makers become your advocates other key organizational players with secondary or indirect arguments.

Multi-level targeting

Why do people buy "The ultimate driving machine" (BMW)? Because of its classy performance of course. Who do you need to convince if you want to buy a can of "The Real Thing" (Coca Cola)? No-one but yourself. When developing a marketing strategy for consumers, consumer packaged goods firms generally concentrate on developing a unique selling proposition to convince only one person, the buyer.

In an organization, however, multiple people are involved. More significantly, few people can make a decision without explaining or justifying it to someone else, whether a superior, someone at their same level, or someone they manage. And that makes all the difference in the world when it comes to developing effective messaging.

An argument is not a confession

Effective selling into an organization means making your target your advocate when it comes to explaining or justifying buying your product or service to someone else in the organization. And, you need to recognize that the arguments your target finds personally compelling may not be identical to the arguments your target will use to justify his choice to others. In other words, your target may be persuaded by one set of arguments but use a very different set to convince others so that his argument to others may not represent a "confession" of his personal beliefs.

For example, consider the purchase of new servers. A manufacturer might offer a server that has many positive benefits: easier to manage, lower acquisition costs, "greener", etc. IT directors - let's assume your target - may strongly prefer to buy that brand of server, primarily because its easier to manage, thus requiring less weekend work for their staff. Traditionally the ad agency would then develop messaging around ease of management.

However, if it involves a brand switch, then the IT director not only has to justify the choice to his superiors (who wonder why the old brand was not good enough) but they must also explain it to the IT staff (who wonder why they have to learn to support a new server brand).

That justification will be based on the secondary or indirect message, and is often not the same as the primary selling proposition that appealed to the IT director, and upon which the ad campaign is often based. The IT director may argue to upper management that his brand choice is an excellent one for the organization because of lower acquisition costs, because he knows lower cost is the more compelling argument to his superiors. Thus, to be effective, marketing messages must not only contain the primary compelling selling proposition for the IT director, they must also convey secondary arguments and details he can use to convince others that it is the right brand choice. Highly effective messaging means giving the IT director the indirect arguments he can use to be your advocate to others in the organization.

This means that the marketing people (whether hardware, software or services) must not only understand the preferences of IT directors, but also what most appeals to those people to whom the IT director needs to justify his choice. Before creating a marketing strategy and its messages, work to understand your target audience and the roles they play in the purchase process.

- Find out which functions and levels within organizations are involved in the decision making process for your product.
- Determine what unique requirements each decision maker has for your product.
- Determine appropriate media outlets for each decision maker.
- Craft unique messages that will resonate with the primary decision maker and enable him or her to convince others that your product is the one that is needed.

Yarnell Difference

Using techniques we have developed to uncover arguments and justifications for product choices, Yarnell Inc. can research your target market and help you answer these questions so that your marketing will make your products the obvious choice for everyone.

Spend research dollars in proportion to your ignorance; anyone can spend less money, Yarnell can help you spend your money smarter.

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Appeal beyond IT

Even when dealing with technology, key influencers and ultimate decision makers are not always part of the IT organization. Buying decisions may need the endorsement of people like the CFO or end users who know little about IT. Their needs must be addressed in order to turn those companies into customers.

So does that mean twice as many groups?

You do not have to double the size of a project to understand both the decision maker and the people to whom he or she needs to justify his or her choice. Yarnell Inc. has developed a set of research techniques that elicit both what the immediate decision maker finds compelling about a product or service as well as the arguments needed to justify the choice to others in the organization.