Strategic Communications: Making Your Marketing and Website Content Work for Your Business
by Andrea C. Carrero

ABSTRACT
Effective business marketing communications require that messages be tailored for the audience, reflecting an understanding of the reader’s concerns and motivations. The message must directly address what is most relevant for the audience and inspire further interest in the information services or products offered. It must be written in sharp and concise language and should conclude with a call to action. The basic message can be presented through a variety of media, including brochures and articles, websites and webinars, Twitter messages and training events, and more, always branding the business consistently.

KEYWORDS
business marketing communications activities information content strategic planning independent information professionals

It’s Not about You. That’s the first thing I tell my clients. “It’s not about you – it’s about them.”

It’s amazing how many businesses think that writing a laundry list of capabilities in their marketing materials or on their websites will entice clients to purchase products or services.

Think about it – when was the last time you bought something simply by looking at a laundry list of what it does? Probably not recently, if at all. You need to be convinced that the item offers something you need.

So why should your marketing and website content be any different? Let’s examine some key ingredients you will need to make your marketing and website effective as tools for bringing awareness to your company, which in turn can help to gain clients for your business.

Audience/Perspective
Who are you talking to? You need to understand who you are talking to and what motivates them or, in other words, what their pain points are. If you are targeting corporate CEOs, you likely will want to speak to a higher level of business concern than if, for example, you are pitching business to lower-level managers. The two audiences have quite different perspectives and quite different pain points.

For example, a CEO is not nearly so interested in how something gets done as in how much revenue (directly or indirectly) it brings to the firm. A manager, however, will be more interested in what it takes to get a project done, when it will be completed and how the cost will affect his or her budget. Knowing the demographics of your audience, such as who they are,
how old they are, what they already know and how they will receive your message, will help you to keep the right perspective.

**Message/Relevance/The Hook**

If you don’t have the right message – one that is relevant for the audience you’re addressing – then knowing whom you’re talking to won’t make a difference. Let’s once again look at the idea of pain points. If you are hurt and bleeding from an accident, would you really care that the bandage applied to your wound has see-through plastic straps to adhere to your wound? Or is it more likely that you would care that the wound will be covered with a gauze pad that will protect the wound and help to stop the bleeding? That’s addressing a pain point. We want to know what the product will do that matters for us.

The same applies to providing services to other firms. Your prospects want to know what you can do for them, so your message has to reflect the answers. And if you know their pain points, you can easily frame a message to speak directly to their concerns.

But what’s a hook? A hook is the compelling idea that makes the reader want to learn more about what you do. Generating an emotion is a classic way to hook the reader. You see them all of the time:

“Want to generate more income? Become a network marketer and earn cash while sitting on the beach!”

Who doesn’t want or need to earn more income? Of course you’d be interested in learning more – this approach has caused an emotional reaction in you – hooked you – and you want to read on.

**Language**

Language is important, but we’re not talking about English versus French. What we mean here is that the verbiage you use to create your hook and your message needs to relate back to your audience. If you’re trying to capture the attention of a CEO, tugging on his or her heartstrings with flowery language won’t do the job. You need to use crisp, sharp, pointed language that addresses his or her concerns head on. Knowing your demographics on this person helps. After all, CEOs rarely have extra time to sit around and read endless copy. So, you should target his or her pain points with language that mimics how he or she thinks – what’s the end result? Or to phrase this requirement a different way, what’s in it for him or her?

Yet if you’re trying to sell the proverbial ice to an Eskimo, you need language that will be softer and address different concerns. Remember, at the heart of your communication is a message that you’re selling something.

**Call to Action**

Now that you know your audience, what they need to read and what key words and phrases your language needs to use, you have to have a strong call to action. A call to action is that last thing you hear on infomercials on television:

“Call now and get two space-age blankets for the price of one!”

The commercial is enticing you to get a bargain – but only if you act. Your call to action needs to be appropriate to the marketing vehicle you’re using. For example, you may want to include a newsletter signup on your marketing materials and website. Simply ask your prospects to be a recipient of your newsletter. Once they sign up, you keep their interest by providing information that’s important to them (a key ingredient in any newsletter). And, of course, keep a low-level sell aspect in the background. Address those pain points (subtly) and how your firm can help solve their problems.

**Media**

The strategic part of communication relates to the media you use to promote your message. Your marketing message needs to reflect the media appropriately – your website, one-sheet, officer bio, blog, Twitter account, LinkedIn profile, tagline, articles, webinars, training, books…any communication you use to promote your business.

Make sure your message is consistent across each of these products so that you’re branding your business appropriately. Once you identify what the campaign needs to be about, then you need to craft a central message that hits the pain points of your prospects and refine that message to fit your media.

For example, you may want to write an article for your newsletter and
invite your prospects to read that article by signing up for your newsletter. You may take the first few paragraphs of the article and put them on your website as an abstract, inviting readers to sign up for your newsletter in order to read the rest of the article. You may want to tweet (in 140 characters or less) that you’ve written the article and create a shortened URL link to where people can find the article/abstract. Of course, you’ll want to include hashtags to any industry or trade groups so that your tweet gets picked up and possibly re-tweeted. You may want to include a one-liner on the bottom of your email in the signature as to the availability of the article. And so on…

**Conclusion**

It is important to think through all aspects of your marketing communications and the media you are using. You need to speak to the right people, address their needs (not yours) using language familiar to them, have a solid message or hook and a strong call to action in order to attract prospects and win business. And you need to weave a consistent message across all of the media you’re using in order to brand your business. Thinking critically and strategically is crucial to your success and that of your business.