

HOW SMALL BUSINESSES CAN COMPETE WITH GIANTS

Small business people must make their marketing dollars work smarter and harder than their large competitors'. Here are just a few things we have learned that can help you build sales with a small budget.

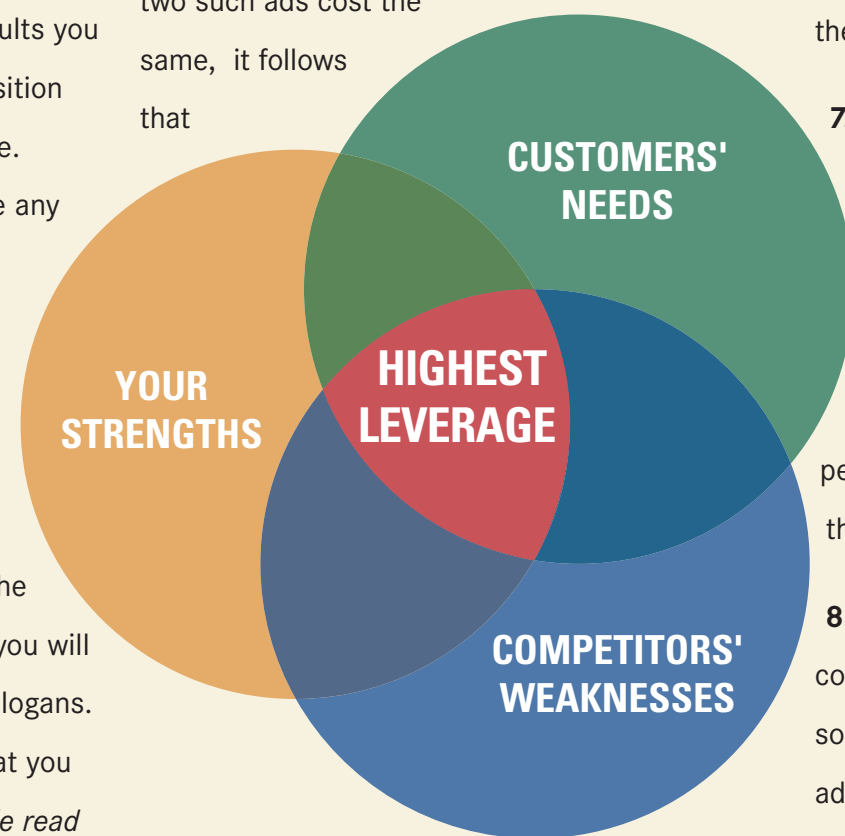
1. Focus on a winning position. The results you achieve will depend more on how you position your product or service than anything else. Decide your positioning before you create any advertising. *Good positioning focuses on what your customers need that you do better than competitors.* Focusing on that provides the greatest return on your communication dollars.

2. Promise a benefit in the headline. The second most important decision is what you will promise the prospect. Promises are not slogans. They should be based on real benefits that you deliver. *On average, five times more people read the headline than the body copy.* So put the benefit in the headline; burying the benefit in copy will waste 80 percent of your money. Headlines with a benefit sell more than those without one.

3. Be consistent. Consistency is the foundation of any brand. It builds your reputation faster and cheaper than inconsistency. Inconsistency confuses employees and prospects.

4. Build your campaign on big ideas. People see and hear thousands of ads and commercials each day, but can remember only a few. Big ideas stand out because of their uniqueness. Prospects notice and remember them.

Surveys often show differences in readership of 20X or more for ads in the same publication. If two such ads cost the same, it follows that



To maximize your return, focus relentlessly on what your customers need that you do better than competitors.

putting better ideas on a page represents your greatest opportunity to maximize your ROI.

5. Motivate all audiences. In business-to-business sales, you must often address the needs of influencers, recommenders, approvers and gatekeepers. Omitting one of these factions could torpedo the sale and waste your entire budget.

6. Target tightly. Avoid waste. Use the media whose readership or viewership most closely match your prospects – geographically, demographically and psychographically. For instance, 95 percent of the Houston Business Journal's readers run small- to medium-sized businesses. If you sell to this audience, you would be hard pressed to find a more efficient way to reach them.

7. Dominate. Small businesses struggle against invisibility. Yet owners sometimes think they save money by running smaller ads less often. You can't cross a chasm in two small leaps. Make sure your ad is big enough to be noticed. Look more important than your competitor. The biggest waste of money is a program that fails to achieve results.

8. Inspire confidence. People draw instant conclusions about your company based on the sophistication of your marketing materials. If your ads, business cards, brochures, and web site do not look first class, they will not inspire confidence. Your communication should reflect the quality you provide. Create a perception of value that supports your margins.

9. Create story appeal with images. Intriguing visuals act as a stop sign. They make readers ask, "What's this about?" Then they read the copy to find out. The more story appeal you build into visuals, the greater your readership.

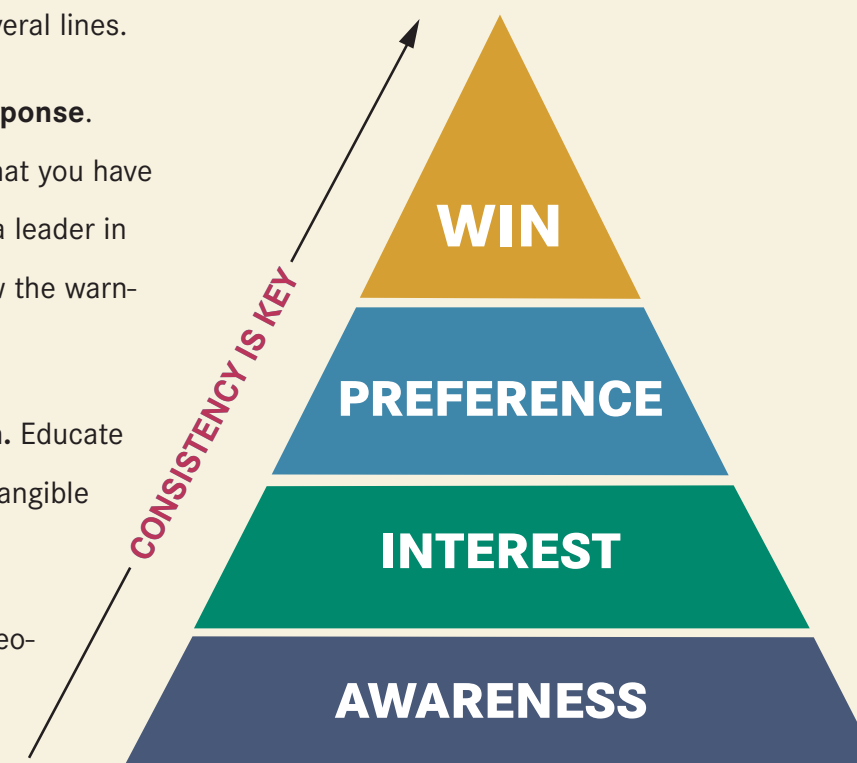
10. Tell the whole story in your headline, subheads and captions. Most people never read all of the copy in an ad. So if you want them to get your message, tell the entire story in the headline, subheads, and captions. This communicates quickly to the most people possible. It also provides multiple "ports of entry" into the copy and shows interested parties where to drill down quickly for more information on a topic that may interest them. It's like fishing with several lines.

11. Quiz the reader to increase response. Quizzes involve readers. They imply that you have answers. This helps establish you as a leader in your field. For instance, "Do you know the warning signs of a heart attack?"

12. Give people helpful information. Educate and inform. Make your advertising a tangible manifestation of your expertise.

13. Feature a "call to action." Tell people what you want them to do and they may. An insurance agency conducted a test on two successive days. They ran a small ad in the same paper in the same position. The only difference: one contained the words, "Call Now"; the other didn't. The one *without* the call to action generated *no* leads; the one *with* it *flooded* their phone lines.

14. Build a bond of trust. The biggest problem any small business faces is credibility. Can you deliver? People won't buy from salesmen they don't trust. Likewise, they won't buy from advertising they don't trust. Everything in your message should *be* true and *ring* true. Your credibility is at stake. Avoid empty, generic promises that anyone could make. Be specific about your offerings and expertise.



Winning a new customer happens in four distinct steps. Information needs increase at each level. Consistency at each touch-point builds awareness faster at a lower cost.

15. Use diagrams and graphs to telegraph your message. People have little time. Visuals can show how something works, and how *well* it works, instantly. They read quickly, simplify comprehension and give people "permission to believe."

16. Appeal to the heart and head. People notice, read and remember a message more intensely if the message reaches them on an emotional as well as an intellectual level.

17. Break the pattern. Guidelines like those above always have exceptions. The essence of advertising is creativity. Breaking rules sometimes creates breakout campaigns. Only testing will tell if you've stepped into the abyss or redefined the rule book.

18. Test and recalibrate constantly. Good market research can be expensive. But that doesn't mean inexpensive market research is invalid. Ask customers, prospects media reps and salespeople for their opinions. The results may not be statistically projectable, but they often correlate highly with expensive surveys. Caution: never kill an idea based on feedback from one person.

19. Don't let entertainment values overpower the message. Entertaining ads can break through clutter, increase readership and favorably predispose people to your brand. Just make sure that humor doesn't overpower the sales message. Entertainment should be used to make a point or underscore a benefit. Sales, not laughs, are your objective.

For more ideas that can help you increase the effectiveness of your marketing communication, call 281.359.2524.

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