

Marketing's Magic Bullet: Does it Exist?

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"What marketing activity can our company do to get the best results?"

While there are many variations on this perennial question, what companies *really* want to know—what they are really getting at—is this: *what one activity, what one type of marketing program can I spend my money on that's going to be more effective than all the others?* In other words, is there some sort of "magic bullet" for marketing success? Unfortunately, many organizations seem to think so.

There have been many instances over the years that could be cited as examples, but one comes to mind because it was particularly painful to watch since the company was basically a start-up—a small, entrepreneurial software developer with very limited funding.

Prior to engaging Inline, they had forked over \$40,000 for *one* ad that ran *one* time in one magazine. Their management team was convinced this ad would increase their exposure exponentially and generate an endless supply of inbound leads. Well, you know the rest of the story.

This is not an isolated incident. Companies every day pin great hope (and dollars) on knee-jerk, one-up programs. They believe that if they just do this one e-mail campaign or run this one ad in the bonus distribution issue of a particular trade publication, that the leads will start pouring in.

While small to mid-sized organizations most often fall prey to these types of "opportunities" as they are referred, even larger, more established organizations are not immune from this mindset. Big companies are just as adept at lopping off huge chunks of their annual marketing budget for a single initiative, expecting miracles.

Branding is one area where this can occur. While a sophisticated brand is a tremendous asset to your company, you still have to *do* something with it to turn the value of the new brand into a viable awareness/credibility/lead-generating program.

Tradeshaw sponsorships are another example. Your company may receive recognition from expending thousands of dollars to become a "gold," "silver" or "platinum" sponsor, but what are you doing in combination to drive traffic to your booth before the show? During the show? Do you have a post show follow up strategy?

It's not that I'm singling out any one type of marketing program or campaign as wrong. It's just that in and of themselves, without other supporting programs to supplement and reinforce them, these initiatives simply won't garner the longer term results companies—particularly young companies—need to grow.

Integration—Not Just for Software

Technology companies know how vital integration is to the functionality of their offering. Well, the same concept holds true in marketing. Successfully marketing your solutions and services in today's competitive environment requires an integrated marketing strategy, comprised of a series of focused initiatives that directly align with your sales and overall business goals.

That strategy and the execution of it must be consistent, it must be conducted (and measured) over time, and the programs and campaigns must effectively leverage each other to drive and support your sales and ultimately, move your business forward.

Marketing Strategies are Like Fingerprints

The determination of what programs will constitute your integrated plan must tie back to your organization's overall business goals.

That's why no two companies' marketing strategies will be identical. *Company A* may focus on a mix of aggressive editorial outreach, a national advertising program in the top trade journals and a strong e-mailing program. *Company B* may opt to pursue speaking opportunities for its high-energy executives at key industry tradeshows, combined with a blogging strategy that helps position them as thought leaders. *Company C* may need to clarify its overly complex messages to market, so their integrated program may start with a focus on rebuilding their communications platform. The point is, it takes a *combination* of programs all working together, not just to make the needle jump once or twice, but to keep it there and continue to build momentum.

The Good, the Bad and the Reality

The good news is you can forget the magic bullet theory. There's really no benefit in

expending time or dollars on "one up" marketing efforts that elicit results that will only be fleeting at best.

The bad news is, you can forget the magic bullet theory. Building and executing an integrated strategy is a lot harder than brainstorming one "killer" project. It takes a great deal of thought, research, a strong understanding of your organization's objectives, determining how to effectively position your company against competitors, the ability to leverage each program in the mix with the others, and much more.

The reality is, when it comes to sophisticated type marketing necessary to fuel the growth of an organization, no single campaign, project or initiative will give you truly sustainable results. An integrated strategy is the optimum approach to put your organization on a trajectory toward success.

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Inline provides on-demand marketing director services and implementation resources to help small to mid-sized technology companies transform their ability to market themselves more effectively. Inline helps businesses increase awareness, strengthen credibility and expand sales opportunities in order to drive revenue and achieve their business objectives. For more information, visit www.inlinemarketingpartners.com.