



A Message from the President

All I want for Christmas is a Marketing Plan

BY TIFFANY PLOWMAN

What does fall mean to you? Leaves changing, cool weather and Texas football? Perhaps, but for me, it means calculating year-over-year return on investment and developing a comprehensive marketing plan for 2006 that ultimately impacts the bottom line. Now if only I could just add that comprehensive marketing plan to Santa's list...

As we end 2005 and look to new beginnings in 2006, many of us are reflecting on a year of accomplishments and lessons learned. During this process, I encourage you to look beyond that marketing plan that Santa might bring and ask yourself what you have accomplished this year both personally and professionally. Have you changed? Are you one step closer to your ultimate goals? As you look to next year, do you know where you want to be, who you want to become? The answer to these questions is truly at the heart of any marketing plan, both professionally and personally.

Sometimes our goals for the coming year can be rather simple, like taking that UT Informal



Tiffany Plowman

Class on feng shui or experiencing more art and culture in Austin, so that we are more creative in our everyday lives. When it comes to careers, though, we often bite off the whole enchilada.

Perhaps you are considering entering a new career, starting your own business or growing your current business twofold by implementing an innovative new program. Whatever it is, it can be quite a daunting task, filled with unexpected twists and turns.

As you embark on these adventures, take advantage of all that AWC Austin has to offer. This supportive network of talented communications professionals continues to offer unmatched services when it comes to professional programming events and networking opportunities. Our luncheon programs are better than ever, with thought-provoking topics you can take back to the office. We have also brought back the beloved introductions, which makes networking with Austin's top communications professionals easier than ever.

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Information at your fingertips: AWC national online database

The AWC National Member Database is a key member benefit and is available to members 24 hours a day. You can use it to update your profile, look up other members, contact the Austin chapter and access bulletins, polls and announcements. You will soon be able to renew and receive instant confirmation of your membership.

Logging in

To log on, go to www.womcom.org and select "Members Only Area" on the entry page, or from the home page, select the "Members Only Area" in the upper right corner and click "here." You will then see a login screen. Log in with the special user name and password you have been assigned,

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Calendar

January

Freelance Austin Meeting

Date: Wednesday, January 11

Time: 12:30 p.m.

Location: Park Plaza Hotel,
6000 Middle Fiskville Road

AWC Monthly Luncheon

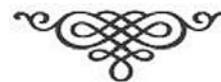
Date: Wednesday, January 18

Time: 11:30 p.m.

Location: Westwood Country Club,
3808 W. 35th Street

Topic: Strategic Event Marketing:
Lessons Learned from
the Front Lines

Description: Almost every communication professional has to plan an event at some point in time. Whether it's the launch party for a new product, a national board meeting, or an employee celebration, communications and event planning go hand in hand. But what makes a great event? How do you move beyond "planning a party" to implementing a strategic marketing plan that has clear objectives and tactics whose successes are measurable? At AWC's January 2006 luncheon hear from professionals doing exactly that.



Getting the best bang for your marketing buck

BY NANCY EDWARDS

In today's media-saturated marketplace, knowing where to invest your marketing dollars can be difficult at best. Advertising vs. public relations, direct mail vs. e-mail marketing, live events vs. virtual, the options can paralyze even the most decisive entrepreneur or marketing director, especially when budgets are limited.

When you are faced with the decision of how to invest precious marketing resources, ask yourself this first: Do I have a marketing plan that truly supports my company's goals?

The power of a plan

Even experienced marketing directors can sometimes put the cart before the horse – developing a marcom plan without fully addressing how it supports company objectives. Startups often fall prey to the CEO-driven “message of the month,” completely ignoring what the customer needs to hear. Even large corporations must constantly reassess marketing activities to ensure they are delivering efficient return on investment.

Executing tactics before you determine an overall marketing strategy radically compromises your chances of success. We have seen it all before: the direct campaign in a vacuum, with no fulfillment strategy or sales follow-up; the brochureware Web site with no way for prospects to interact with the company or raise their hands as potential customers; the one-shot, self-congratulatory press release with no discernible objective whatsoever.

The best marketing plans are a combination of business analytics, research and creative chutzpah. They are living, breathing documents, with input and visibility across the company. Most include some combination of the following elements:

- marketing objectives that support business (sales) goals;
- audience segmentation;
- pricing and distribution strategy;
- positioning that differentiates your company from the competition;
- messaging that supports the positioning;
- communications tactics to achieve the plan's goals; and
- measurement/evaluation methods.

If you are an entrepreneur, all that is needed to create a marketing plan is self-discipline, a customer-

focused attitude and the willingness to refine your strategies along the way. Outside resources can provide an objective sounding board, or develop a plan (or research that goes into the plan), but stay involved in the process to ensure the plan's relevance to business realities.

If you work in a larger company where the CEO is a driving force, include him or her in the plan development process. Understanding sales goals and building relationships with the sales team will help make your plan “street worthy.” And don't forget to include input from the customer service team – every marketing plan should address customer retention strategies (it's always less costly to keep existing customers than to attract new ones). With input from top management, sales and customer service, your marketing plan will have a much greater chance of being executed.

When opportunity strikes

Let's say you've done the hard part – you have determined the objectives, target audience, pricing/distribution and positioning/messaging. How do you choose the right communications tactics to support your well-thought-out plan? Which ones give you the most bang for your buck?

There are some *general* rules of thumb when it comes to marketing investments: Advertising is more expensive than PR; direct mail is more expensive than e-mail marketing; live events are more costly than virtual, or online, seminars. But to develop a truly effective plan with great ROI, you have to do more than crunch numbers. You have to understand your audience — who they are, how they live, how your product or service meets their needs, and what their purchase decision-making process is. Only then can you implement tactics that will move prospects from Point A (Interest) to Point B (Trial) to Point C (Adoption) – with few if any detours along the way.

A few rules of the road:

Know your customers – and their media habits. Having clearly defined demographics and psychographics helps you understand your customers' media habits, and can stop you from spending unnecessarily big bucks. If they are soccer moms, don't advertise to them in *The Wall Street Journal*. If they are working moms, don't look for them in *Ladies Home Journal*. If they are new moms,

don't expect them to have time to read at all. You would be better off canvassing their neighborhood with door hangers.

Know your A.Q. What is your company's “awareness quotient”? Is your company an unknown commodity with no brand awareness at all? Are your prospects aware of your product/service and ready to take the dialogue to a deeper level? If they do not know who you are, don't waste your time on direct mail. Let them get to know you better first through awareness-building tactics such as PR, well-targeted advertising or events. If they are ready for more information, consider a Web seminar or case studies to help them understand how they could be using your product or service.

Know your sales cycle. How long is the typical sales cycle and how much interaction is needed to close a sale? Can the transaction occur online or does it require human assistance? If you do not understand your sales cycle, spend a day with a sales person. See what kinds of objections prospects raise. Find out when people need more information and how they get it. Then you can craft a direct campaign with high- and low-touch elements to assist the sale and convert prospects into loyal customers.

Know your limitations. Be realistic about what your marketing plan can achieve. If budget is an issue, set priorities. Define success in business terms and determine what can be done realistically to achieve those goals. If success means getting three new big customers this year, you do not need a lot of advertising to do it. If it means selling thousands of products, what is the most efficient way to reach those prospects with the highest value information? Web sites are still highly underutilized by most smaller (and some larger) companies, and e-mail marketing is a powerful tool to drive people to your site. But the best e-mail lists are not bought; they are created. Do you have a prospect database you can mine to create a powerful in-house e-mail marketing list?

It's all about ROI

Getting the most bang for your marketing buck is all about planning and ROI – with involvement from key stakeholders every step of the way. Set expectations with management, peers, as well as

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What's your best tip?

Following are a few marketing tips and tactics from AWC members in the trenches. To give us yours, e-mail communications@awcaustin.org. The best ones will be published in the next newsletter.

Margaret Harrist, senior marketing communications manager, The Neverfail Group:

It is important to establish relationships with the media and to pitch solid story ideas on a regular basis. Media coverage is great for building your business' credibility. Another key is developing alliances with other businesses, as long as it can truly be a win-win.

Lisa Maxwell, co-owner, The Work*Shop:

Never underestimate the power of a good Web site. People find us on the Web with increasing frequency and we definitely get traffic into the store as a result of our Web site. The site speaks for us and gives us an image that differentiates us from the competition.

Karen Zelina, president, Brilliant Ideas Group:

We created a monthly technology news report to send out for a client, using our own surveys, customer data, industry expert articles and industry information. We printed and sent out about 2,500 of these a month. The ROI was a 50 percent increase in awareness of the company (a startup) and the product.

Considering a career change? Plan before you proceed

BY RENEE TRUDEAU

Approximately 85 percent of professionals returning to school are planning to change careers, and studies say up to 65 percent of working professionals are seriously considering changing careers.

Transitioning to a new career requires courage and a willingness to take risks. The hardest and most important questions to answer when considering a change are "am I clear on what I really want?" and "am I willing to do the work to get there?" Having clarity and focus, knowing how and where to locate resources to help you make the transition and building a support system to assist you during this process can help diminish fear and frustration. Below are a few guidelines to help you get started:

- 1) **Draft a plan and timeline**, realizing that if you need training or special skills, it may take one to two years or more to successfully transition to your new career.
- 2) **Do your homework:** Informational interviews, professional organizations, universities, community colleges and continuing education programs are all great sources for information.
- 3) **Start working right away in the area you want to move into**—even if it is on a contract, part-time or volunteer basis—while still at your current job.

4) **Get clear on what it is you do best** and brainstorm on how you can leverage these strengths and talents. Ask who highly values these specific strengths.

5) **Create a support system** and seek the counsel of friends, mentors, coaches, consultants and support groups to guide you and provide feedback throughout your career change.

6) **Save as much as you can** now and set up a financial plan to allow for flexibility and financial breathing room while getting started in your new career.

There is no right or wrong way to make a career change. However, a little foresight and planning and a lot of support can make all the difference in how you experience the journey.

Career and executive coach Renee Trudeau is president of Career Strategists. She helps professionals and small business owners successfully integrate who they are with what they do. To receive a free copy of her online newsletter, Career Management Resources, visit www.careerstrategists.net or e-mail renee@careerstrategists.net.

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Online *continued*

which you will receive in an e-mail. For security purposes, you may change your password after your initial login, but your user name will remain the same.

Profile update

Once you have logged into the database, click "My Profile" in the upper left corner to open your profile. Any fields in boxes can be edited. After making changes, click "Save" to record the changes, and you should see "Profile updated successfully" in blue at the top of the screen.

Individual member search

To search for an individual member, use the search feature from the directory tab to look up her last name. Her record should come up on the screen. From this point, you can e-mail the member directly, if you wish, by clicking on the e-mail address in the profile.

Chapter member search

To search for all Austin chapter members, use the advanced search feature from the directory tab. You will use the "Directory Search" function, which is the first section.

In "Pick a Field," select "Chapter Number," then tab to the "Search For" field and type in Austin's chapter number, 004. All Austin chapter members should come up on the screen.

Questions

If you have any questions or problems, or if you have forgotten your user name and password, contact sclnard@womcom.org or call (703) 370-7436.



The Association for
Women in Communications

Austin Professional Chapter
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Marketing buck *continued*

agency partners. Let them know that even the most cost-efficient marketing is not done in a vacuum. It is core to your company's survival. And theirs.

Nancy Edwards is owner and principal of Rational Marketing (www.rational-marketing.com), a strategic marketing and creative services firm.

Association for Women in Communications • AUSTIN PROFESSIONAL CHAPTER BOARD CONTACT LIST

President: Tiffany Plowman
464-9432, president@awicaustin.org

President-Elect: Julie Garcia
312-5668, presidentelect@awicaustin.org
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426-0685, newmembers@awicaustin.org

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264-8384, members@awicaustin.org

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495.9900, development@awicaustin.org

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228-5759, banner@awicaustin.org

VP/Professional Development: Marisa Rainsberger
471-4945, professionaldev@awicaustin.org

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445-5745, community@awicaustin.org

VP/ Career Services: Pam Crowther
324-3170, careerservices@awicaustin.org

VP/Communications: Nancy Edwards
371-3356, communications@awicaustin.org

Scholarship Chair: Kathryn Gragg
scholarship@awicaustin.org

Newsletter (online): Lindsey Starnes
532-5756, eletter@awicaustin.org

Newsletter (print): Tonyia Sullivan
554-5453, newsletter@awicaustin.org

Publicity: Lindsey Tishgart
publicity@awicaustin.org

Web Site: Meredith Lupa
241-1714, webmaster@awicaustin.org

Arrangements: Erin Crook
244-0577, rsvp@awicaustin.org

National Organization Liaison: Amy Carr
249-0914, nationalboard@awicaustin.org

Student Chapter Liaison: Erin Prather
916-4969, students@awicaustin.org

Freelance Austin Liaison: Julie Tereshchuk
231-0939, freelance@awicaustin.org

President *continued*

Our listserv is also a priceless, members-only service that holds the secret to anything you want to know — from the best print vendors in town, to hurricane volunteer opportunities to views on freedom of information and the state of journalism today.

In addition, we continue to offer personalized career services that enable you to grow your career. Our job bank features Austin's premier communications jobs, often not found elsewhere, for members looking for a new opportunity. If you need advice from seasoned communicators, we offer mentor matching with professionals that can offer you candid advice to expand your career. We also continue to provide resume critiques from fellow communicators who can help you best brand yourself for that next new gig.

Above all, AWC Austin continues to offer you a supportive network of professional communicators. So as you embark on new adventures over the next year, take advantage of the resources our chapter has to offer. Get involved, volunteer and let us know how we can best help you in 2006.