

Why Branding Becomes More Important In Uncertain Times

It's not unusual for business-to-business companies to cut communications budgets when faced with uncertain times like economic downturns, mergers/acquisitions, reorganization, significant competitive threats, technology changes and the like.

And yet, it is precisely these situations in which communications that support the brand are most helpful. If there's ever a time when you need the strength, continuity, and support of a healthy brand, it's when there's uncertainty.

Harness the Power of Your Brand

There's good reason to support the enduring power of a brand in uncertain times: in all but the most localized situations, it's not just one company that finds itself in a bind, it's an entire market or industry. So, when your company is in trouble, your customers, channels, and competitors are often facing similar difficulty. And, people who are worried about sales, profits, or jobs rarely take chances, usually going with a recognized brand they can trust.

The worse the times, the greater the impact. No one's going to buy from a company that is on the ropes, one that might not survive an economic downturn, unless they think it's a fire sale. So, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Companies that hunker down during hard times can frequently be perceived as being on the ropes, no matter the real status of their balance sheet. And, perception has a nasty way of becoming reality, especially in a prolonged downturn. (Your competitors will help that perception along, if they can.)

What's a B-to-B Company to Do? Invest Wisely!

The clear evidence is that companies who continue to communicate and promote in hard times fare better during the downturn, and recover more quickly, gaining market share at the expense of their less aggressive competitors. It's a lot like making investments during down times; it may be counter-intuitive but it's the best time to invest – in your portfolio or in your brand.

That does not necessarily mean that you need to expand budgets, buy trade magazine spreads, or do the same thing you've always done. Uncertain times are a great opportunity to rethink what you've been doing.

The current uncertain times present a particularly unique opportunity for B-to-B marketers. Technology has changed the B-to-B marketing communications landscape. You have available to you so many more ways to communicate with your marketplace. Many of these [new channels](#) don't require you to hand over significant sums of money to a

publishing company. This is the time to rethink what you've done before and reallocate your communications budget and resources in acknowledgement of the [changing marketing communications](#) landscape; to begin to use media (message delivery) vehicles that you can control. Today's new communications media offer a wide range of choices that might allow you to maintain or even enhance your visibility with the same expense or perhaps even less.

You might ask what your web site, let alone blogs, podcasts, paid search, and other Web 2.0 tactics have to do with branding. Our answer is, quite a bit. While employed largely as response vehicles, all of these tactics have a branding element. In fact, we say all communications, all experiences, all customer touch points have branding elements.

Your web site, the internet and all features associated with it allow you to enhance and enrich the experience that your marketplace has with you. This is the opportunity you want to maximize every day, but especially in these uncertain times.

By the way, you will also have metrics that you have never had before to demonstrate a return on investment and have an answer the next time you are asked, "What am I getting for all this money we spend on marketing communications?"

Eight Cost-Effective Ways to Keep Your Brand Top-of-Mind

- 1. Public relations.** Press releases on new products, new applications, or new success stories are a great value, no matter what's happening. And, they show you're flourishing in a bad economy. (Can include self-published PR, SMPR, etc.)
- 2. Brand ambassadors.** View your entire organization, not just marketing, as a branding medium. Sales and customer service people should be trained about the brand and equipped to present the brand message. Even your channel should be considered ambassadors for your brand. (Used to be called internal branding, now even more important with the ability for employees to participate in blogs and social media.)
- 3. Social media.** Participate in blogs, online discussion groups, and social media. You'll find allies in the strangest places, and get seat-of-the-pants market research simply by spending the time.
- 4. Search.** When people type into the Google search box, they're looking for something. Make sure your prospects find you easily, with good search optimization on your web site and search engine marketing as appropriate. (Now is a good time to see if you "own" your own brand in search engines. If you don't, that might be a good place to start.)
- 5. Direct.** Don't spend vast sums on advertising or search if you have your own list. Pull your list of prospects and customers from all areas of your organization and begin a regular dialog. Your best prospects for new sales are your existing customers. Cultivating lukewarm prospects makes a lot of sense where sales cycles are long and sales reps are overworked.
- 6. Your web site.** Slow times may be the perfect opportunity to add capabilities that will make it easier for your customers to buy from you. Make sure your product information is current and complete. Add customer success stories and technical bulletins.
- 7. Podcasts.** First it was sales reps listening to technical information in the car between calls. Now it's everyone, listening to audio information in cars, health clubs, airports, and shopping malls. Being the source of that information supports a leadership positioning.
- 8. Online advertising.** Placing online ads on the most important industry web sites may well be enough to keep you in the selection set.



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Godfrey provides full-service, integrated business-to-business branding and marketing communications services. The agency offers research, brand management, advertising, public relations, digital marketing, search (SEO and SEM), media, direct marketing and analytics services.