

Differentiating Green

2008 may make the advertising text books as *the* year all marketing and advertising went "green". Surprisingly, Green Marketing is not a new concept. In fact, the American Marketing Association (AMA) held the first workshop on "Ecological Marketing" in 1975.

As the principal of a Portland, Oregon marketing firm, I am fortunate to live in one of the most environmentally progressive U.S cities. While Portland has been associated with environmentalism, it seems that the rest of the U.S jumped on the trend in 2008. While it is a pleasure to see so many companies take steps towards a better environment, how do you differentiate your truly green company against green propaganda.

The onslaught of green propaganda creates three problems that you, the marketer of your product/service, must tackle: 1) the consumer does not know what constitutes as a green product or service, 2) the consumer does not know what green product/service to trust and 3) why should the consumer care that your company is a green supplier?

Tackling problem #1 and #2 can be packed into your positioning statement, then reiterated in all of your marketing messages. With any positioning statement, you must live your business philosophy to the fullest. This means if you position yourself as a green company; your product development, your marketing, your business logistics and all of your shareholders must truly believe in the green ideology. Tackling problem #3 is getting easier day-by-day as the consumer's paradigm shifts to concern for the environment.

For an example of a well positioned green company, I look to a colleague of mine, Jonathan Logan. His Portland mortgage company *Better World Mortgage* (www.betterworldmortgage.com) is by no means simply green lip-service. The green philosophy affects the employees to the smallest detail, such as reusable glassware in the office kitchen and the promise to donate 10% of their gross income to any socially responsible charity of the customer's choice. One of Jonathon's competitors, Rose City Mortgage (www.rosecitymtg.com) is also living and breathing their socially responsible philosophy with their own impressive corporate culture.

So what makes *Better World Mortgage* and *Rose City Mortgage* stand out from all other mortgage companies within the greater Portland area? They both have very strong positioning statements that tell you exactly what they stand for, they reiterate what their positioning statement is within every single marketing message they administer and they tell the consumer exactly how their organization is green.

Truth be told, even with the absolute strongest positioning statement and marketing message distributed to your audience, there is a heck of a lot of advertising cluttering the minds of your customers and prospects. Here are some ideas to break through the clutter:

- Know who your target market(s) is/are.
 - Keep in mind that even further segmenting may be required within each target market(s)
- Know what your target market(s) care about. What are they looking for in a green business and what do they believe constitutes as a green business? Is your customer base even ready to make purchase decisions based upon a green philosophy? *Yes, there are still people out there who don't believe in global warming!*

- Reiterate exactly what makes your business green. Some segments of a particular target market will want to know every detail of your green philosophy, other segments just want to be comfortable with your overall philosophy. Segment your marketing message accordingly and be prepared to detail exactly how green you are.
 - For example, don't just say "Green Dry Cleaner" on your business banner. Say something like: "Portland's Only No Chemical Dry Cleaner".
- Keep yourself and the employees happy. When employees are happy, their joyful attitude reinforces trust with prospects and customers. A happy employee is more likely to "talk up" the company during a standard customer service call or a potential large account sitting beside them on TriMet transit.
- Care about your community. Sponsor community events and encourage your employees to get involved in local, social causes. The paid hour you may lose once a week while your employee travels to teach the neighborhood school how to compost is well vested when your employees are truly happy and there-by committed to your green business.

About the author - Sprite Marketing, in its entirety, is not a fully green company and thus not positioned as green. With that said, Sprite Marketing strives every day to decrease its carbon footprint. Sprite Marketing still believes that direct mail and online initiatives are very effective ways to market a service and product, but is aware of the impact both advertising vehicles have on the earth. Because of this, Sprite Marketing develops very targeted marketing strategies that allow clients to reach the target audience with greater impact, at a lower cost and minimal impact on the earth. Visit us online at www.spritemarketing.com.