

The Business Monthly

The Business Newspaper of Howard & Anne Arundel Counties and BWI Business District

Marketing to Baby Boomers...think about this!



By Carolyn West Price

As more and more businesses want to reach the 50+ crowd, they lose sight of some marketing basics. Think about these suggestions as you fine-tune your marketing over the summer.

Big Print, Not Necessarily A Big Ad

There is a time and place for advertising in the phone book, but not all businesses need huge colorful ads intended to dominate their category, despite what some enthusiastic sales reps may lead you to believe. To that end, here are some considerations as you review your commitments to those yellow pages.

I would suggest that if you are a business that has grown mostly by referral, such as a doctor's office or accounting firm, an in-column ad is quite sufficient. If you are a service that people call in an emergency, such as a plumber, you need to go larger. Regardless, consider your audience.

Are aging baby boomers or seniors your target market? If so, the small print in the phone book often sends them searching elsewhere for phone numbers. Work with larger fonts, bolder lettering, details of products and

services and the most simplified of category listings (i.e. Wheelchair Sales/Rentals).

Another thought for your consideration is a really simple test. Open any yellow pages, flip to any page. What jumps out first? The red ads, regardless of size. This is something to consider, and something very few reps will promote because they'd rather see you increase the size of the display ad versus going with an in-column boxed, red ad.

And last, but not least, apply the laws of good advertising design and copy if you are doing display ads. Your ad needs to pop and sell benefits (not features), regardless of the publication. Don't sell yourself short by mom-and-popping the art or design since you have to live with this ad, good or bad, for a year and the cost is the same regardless.

Please press 3 for...

Whatever happened to talking to a live body at the other end of the phone? Better yet, what are the marketing implications of this new trend in impersonal greetings, especially if you're going for an older audience (and particularly if you want seniors to call you)?

First, who are your callers and how will they respond to menu options and no person? If your primary customers are seniors, then doing away with a live body is apt to do away with some of

your business. Seniors, who have done business all their lives with live people, do not feel comfortable with machines.

If, however, you are destined to have an answering system without a live body for a majority of the business day, consider carefully how your system instructs people. Instructing a caller to spell a person's name to access an extension number (regardless of the caller's age) usually proves frustrating because not everyone's name is easy to spell; in many cases callers don't even know a staff person's last name.

Additionally, while you may want to use your message as a marketing tool, be considerate of people's time. You may find a message-on-hold system better for this, rather than a lengthy greeting that uses a caller's cell phone air time before they can even ask for a live body or press this or that.

In closing, we only have so many ways to make a first impression. Is the impression you want to give potential or existing customers/clients an impersonal one? Is this the way you define "service"? Would you like to feel like a number before you even get a chance to spend money?...Well, your callers probably wouldn't like that either.

Carolyn West Price is president of IMPACT Marketing & Public Relations, Inc. She is a member of the practitioner faculty at Johns Hopkins University. She can be reached at 410-461-9398 or www.MilkYourMarketing.com.