

The Business Monthly

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

Promote Your Differences & Price Becomes Secondary



By Carolyn West Price

Who says you have to compete on price, especially in a tight economy?

Think again. Price is only one part of the “marketing mix,” and customers buy the whole thing, not just one part of

it. Sure there are some products or services that are more price sensitive than others, however, in the service industry, relying more on the other elements of the marketing mix will take the emphasis off price.

Specifically, the marketing mix includes the “4Ps” of marketing—price, place, product, and promotion.

If your product is unique, you will likely be able to charge more than if you are in a market with a lot of competition—direct and indirect. If, however, you are in a competitive market (especially for non-essential services, such as tanning sessions or manicures), you must work harder to differentiate your product from your competition. That’s right—differentiate your product.

Remember, the product is a “bundle of tangible and intangible attributes.” Simply put, what you provide to your customers is your product—the entire experience of doing business with you. They are buying the experience of working with you. So, how do you rate? Is it a good experience or a less-

than-pleasant one? From the greeting on the phone, email, or in-person to the delivery, you have a chance to differentiate yourself.

Maybe you offer free delivery and your competitors do not. How about early or late hours to accommodate the normal 9 to 5 work schedule of your customers? How do you “package” your service or product. Are you bare bones or frilly with lots of bells and whistles?

Do you offer a guarantee? How about extending your warranty or providing free phone support?

In tweaking your product for the purposes of providing added value and differentiating yourself from the competition, remember your “revisions” should still be in keeping with presenting a consistent image to the market place.

The next “P” to look at in terms of taking the emphasis off price is “place.” How do customers receive your service or product? Do they come to you or do you go to their place of business? Do you offer free delivery? Do you provide customer services differently than your competition? Look at this “p” from the customer’s perspective and see how you can provide added value in just the way you deliver the benefits of your service or product to them.

Then look at promotion. That is, how do you let people know you not only exist, but what makes you better or more suited for them than your competition. This is where promoting benefits (not features or a list of services) can make you stand out. Sure, you and your competition may provide similar services or products, but how you ex-

press them in terms of what the customer is actually buying will be different.

I could say, “I am a marketing consultant.” Or, I could say, “I create visibility and credibility for clients through creative, cost-effective marketing communications.” You get two very different impressions of what I do, although functionally they are the same.

The tools of promotions are the vehicles you use to tell the world two things: you exist, and what you can do for them better than the next guy can. These “tools” include: public relations, customer relations/referral source relations, advertising, direct selling, collateral (your marketing/corporate identity materials) and promotional events. By carefully planning who you want to reach with your message and what your message is, you can determine the best vehicles for doing so.

Is it press releases and articles in the paper? Billboards on I-95? Full-page phone book ads and direct mailers? Client appreciation parties? You get the idea. You need to identify the most efficient ways to reach your target markets, including current and past customer and employees. Then, make sure you are consistent, consistent, consistent—promoting what makes you different and better. Then, your prospects are less able to assume they’re comparing apples and apples; you’ve done the homework for them to highlight why you are, in fact, a better choice for their hard-earned dollar.

Carolyn West Price is president of IMPACT Marketing & Public Relations, Inc., in Ellicott City. She can be reached at 410-461-9398.