

# PR WEEK

Op-Ed

## Achieving brand relevance in a crowded marketplace

In this day and age of communicating to consumers in real time with real messages aimed at driving real action, it becomes increasingly important to make your brand relevant.

Brand relevance is the art of speaking to your consumer audiences with a message that resonates with them at the moment in time when they are most likely to be receptive to it.

Relevance is the difference between an innovative and technologically advanced product being successful, such as the iPod, and a product struggling to find its audience, like the Segway. In both cases, the product had technological advantages; however, they differed in how the product was delivered, whom it was delivered to, and how it was designed to become a part of the consumer's lifestyle.

Good PR strategies and tactics can have a strong influence on making a brand's products and/or services relevant to target audiences by conveying messages designed to build brand relevance.

The following five questions will help you to determine if your brand is truly relevant to your target audience:

**1. Have I clearly identified my target audience?** Regardless of the quality of your product or service, if you are not speaking to the right audience, your message is falling on deaf ears and, therefore, is irrelevant.

A huge mistake that many brands make is attempting to market to all consumers and ignoring the audience that will ultimately decide their fate. When Toyota launched its Scion brand, it made the aggressive decision to focus on the Gen X and Gen

Y demographics, and successfully supported this with programs, promotions, sweepstakes, partnerships, and a variety of other smart strategies that gave the brand street credibility with this difficult-to-reach market.

**2. Am I speaking to my audience with messages they understand?** Communication is at the heart of every successful product launch. Thus, you must be sure that messages are pertinent, emotional, and accurate in order to be relevant to your target audience.

For example, when Michelob launched Michelob Ultra, it was careful to include messages about its fewer calories, which was particularly relevant to fitness-crazed female urbanites. This message was effectively communicated through press releases, online marketing, and sampling programs.

**3. What innovative way can I reach my target audience in order to be relevant in the marketplace?**

Brands that understand their true product attributes and how they will resonate with consumers are more likely to have success in connecting with them.

Newcastle Brown Ale is one

of the country's fastest growing import beers. It is revered for its "full-flavored and easy to drink" taste. The company realized that the best way to communicate to its target consumer was via an on-premise sampling program. Hence, the "Ale Blazers" program was launched nationwide, resulting in a 10% growth of the brand over the same period the previous year.

**4. How can I activate my brand so it becomes relevant to my target audience?** Brand activation should be one of the driving forces behind most PR efforts. Activation means far more than distributing press releases. It is a brand's ability to reach out and touch its consumer audiences in locations where they are most likely to make a purchasing decision. This activation could take the form of a mobile marketing tour, an events-driven program, or a cleverly orchestrated grassroots program that provides the brand with a chance to interact with its core consumer audience.

When Sanyo was launching its new C5 digital media camera, it deployed a guerrilla street team called the "Pixsters" in key West Coast tourist destinations, such

as San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf and the Space Needle in Seattle. This increased brand awareness and helped drive sales beyond projections.

**5. How can I sustain relevance among my target audience?** Relevance is fleeting. This is especially true in the consumer technology space, where a product's life cycle can be shorter than a football season. However, for all consumer brands, it is more important than ever to regularly communicate with your target audience about new and enhanced products, purchasing incentives, or promotions.

Guitar Center, one of the largest musical instrument retailers in the US, offers a good example. The company maintains a mailing list of more than 10 million customers and takes the opportunity to communicate with this vast audience more than five times a month with news about enter-to-win sweepstakes, skills contests, promotions, and retail discounts. These incentives help to ensure that Guitar Center continues to be relevant within its consumer audience.

All this brings me back to my original point. Brands that are tuned in to their target audiences, understand how to communicate with them, realize their unique selling proposition, and, most important, acknowledge the need to build an emotional connection with them will ultimately prevail in this highly competitive consumer marketplace. The first step toward this end goal is to ask yourself, "Is my brand relevant?"

● Michael Olguin is president of Formula PR.



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