

Measure Twice, Cut Once: Solid Planning for Your Marcom Programs' Success

by Deborah J Hoard

Certainly you've heard the mantra of all carpenters: "Measure twice, cut once". It makes sense to do careful planning particularly when we are using expensive and rare materials that we can't afford to waste or repurchase and when we want to successfully build something solid. But for some reason we don't view our marketing communications (marcom) projects in the same light.

The current mode in many companies is "ready, fire, aim" for their marketing programs. Because companies must respond quickly to rapidly changing environments, planning seems to be viewed as a luxury – not a necessity. The belief seems to be that something – anything – needs to be produced. If we took this approach to build a chair, would you want to sit in it?

In addition, time and employees are often viewed as expendable materials. Companies seem to forget what wasting time and burning out employees costs them in terms of money, less effective programs, and lost opportunities.

Just as with building furniture, planning is essential to producing effective marcom programs. The key planning elements are:

- Gather the information
- Develop the plan
- Obtain executive approval

1) Gather the Information

In order to plan effectively, you need to have a firm idea of what you are creating. Your first step is to gather the project details. The most expedient way to do this is to hold a meeting where the key project shareholders can share their knowledge, goals, and concerns.

The meeting discussion topics should include:

- How well the program supports the overall company business goals
- Program goals and success measurements
- Program value proposition and key marketing messages
- Competition threats and opportunities
- Target audience
- The strategy of the product, placement, positioning, and packaging
- Key milestones

Once the above information is collected, it is time to create the plan.

2) Develop the Plan

Whether it is called the program plan, creative brief, or requirements document, your plan should include the following elements:

- Business case – the program business need and description
- Objectives – the marketing and financial goals
- Key marketing message – the program value proposition, features and benefits, and positioning
- Target audience – the demographics and psychographics of the target audience and the key audience pains that the program will address
- Competition – the competition's market share, strengths, and weaknesses

- Opportunities and threats – the business opportunities and threats that the company will encounter by doing this program
- Considerations and constraints – the legal, market, and cultural considerations and constraints that need to be considered for this program
- Tactical recommendations – the details of the marketing materials to be produced
- Budget – a breakdown of the program budget
- Schedule – key milestones and responsible stakeholders
- Response/measurement – the desired target audience response and the success measurements

After finalizing the program plan, it is time for the final step: obtaining executive approval.

3) Obtain Executive Approval

As you have probably experienced, if you don't have executive approval, you don't really have a plan you can use. Ideally, the key stakeholders have been communicating with their management throughout the planning process and kept abreast of any changes that were then incorporated into the plan. So the plan that is presented to the executives should align with company objectives and not have any surprises.

If possible, it is best to have a formal meeting with the executives to present the plan. In this way, all of them can hear the information at the same time, any concerns can be addressed together, and possible conflicts can be resolved then.

Applying the “measure twice, cut once” principles to marketing communications gives you the important information and measurements you need to build a successful program. This new approach means that you treat your resources as valuable and the end product as something that needs to be beautifully crafted.

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Deborah Hoard, Founder and President of Net Results, has almost 20 years experience of managing the development and production of a variety of global marketing and product launch programs, implementing corporate branding initiatives across all levels of marketing touch points, and creating streamlined and cost-saving project processes using industry best practices, for such top companies as Apple Inc., Cisco Systems Inc., Informatica, Inc., Oracle Corporation, and Seagate Technology. To find out more, visit her website at www.get-net-results.com.