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Innovation and Advertising



The best innovation is one that does not need advertising at all, as its unique benefit is self-explanatory due to its very nature. Usually, however, the benefit is not identified immediately or is simply lost in the world of mass communication. This is especially true where the advertised item is not a tangible object but a service or a product rendering an irrational benefit, perceived by the senses only.

The total number of brands, products and services promoted with advertising budgets exceeds the active vocabulary of a human being. Nevertheless, each single advertiser assumes that his or her message will matter. Advertisers assume this even though the number of messages has grown enormously over the past few years due to increased presence on the Internet, additional TV channels, and new magazines, etc. Often, only the sheer power of advertising volume is what counts to achieve an efficient OTS* or to be seen or perceived. How can a small or medium-sized company ensure that its advertisements will make a difference?

Advertising must become an even more integral component of marketing and innovation management than it is today. What does that mean? The particular performance characteristics of products and services to be advertised must be presented even more strikingly. For this purpose, three seemingly easy questions should be answered:

What can I do better than my competitors?

Differentiation renders one's own profile more accurate and noticeable in a crowd. For this purpose, at least one striking difference should be pointed out. Concentrating on an essential argument may additionally help to make one's message stand out. It is very common for competitors from the same branch to use identical statements in their advertisements. This leads to an inflation on the level of the arguments. The manufacturers of ladders, for example, keep pointing out "quality, safety and innovation". This example also shows that the term "innovation" as such has lost some of its value due to it being frequently misused to differentiate between items that are comparable rather than different. Therefore, it is essential to carefully look for a significant point of differentiation. An offer without characteristics that strikingly differentiate it from others usually does not represent an innovation except where a similar degree of comprehensiveness has so far been unknown in the market. Differentiation, however, is only valuable if the customer is able to benefit from it. Therefore, the second question is:

How will my customer benefit from this?

Most times, it's not just about providing a special quality in a product or service but rather about what the customer ultimately can and wants to achieve with it. Some inventors are very much in love with their own ideas and cannot understand why a certain "innovation" is not accepted by the customers. However, the motives for buying an item usually run more deeply than we assume. Household activities, for example, are not just about the obvious, such as satisfying the family's needs and providing food or about cleanliness in the household, but they are also significantly about irrational needs, such as the taste of the food and the acknowledgement of one's work. If one has recognized the deeper meaning of the products or services and knows where the strengths lie in comparison with the competitors' offerings, the last of the three questions is:

How will my customer hear of this?

Getting noticed in our current environment of sensory overload represents a particular challenge. However, getting noticed at any cost may also become negative. Advertising with a surprising funny element or a celebrity fails if the customer remembers the person or the joke but has not understood the content of the advertising message. In addition to the content of the advertising message, an appropriate selection of time, place and method is of crucial importance. Spectacular places and images such as those used in guerilla marketing for budget reasons, among other things, can attract a high degree of attention. However, they also entail the risk that the innovation will fail because the spectacle exceeds the limits of what is permitted or accepted from a moral or ethical point of view so that permanent harm will be done to the brand and the company. Creative communication must get to the heart of the unique benefit of the innovation and be compatible with the brand of the party issuing the message.

Our three questions therefore seem easy to answer but require in-depth consideration of marketing aspects in order to render an innovation successful.

**OTS = "Opportunity to See" indicates the average number of contacts by a person who frequents an advertising medium within a designated period of time.*