

Special Report

The Continuity Concept

7 C's to a Successful Marketing Program

This *Special Report* was written to serve as a guideline for someone commencing a new business venture. It was also designed as a checklist for the more seasoned entrepreneur or executive in mind. The concept of streamlined continuity is one that should permeate your marketing plans to ensure their distinction and success and is, therefore, the premise of this report. **The Continuity Concept** is not meant to replace your business or marketing plan, but to enhance it. No doubt you have heard it's a jungle out there - well, it's true. Even for the seasoned veteran, the marketplace can be daunting to navigate and from time to time we all get lost. For these reasons **The Continuity Concept** was developed as a compass check for the business owner or executive looking to make sure they are on the right path.

1. Create a plan

If you aren't planning to go anywhere in particular, that's exactly where you'll end up.

It doesn't matter whether you're a small business owner looking to attract new customers, a CEO of a successful company interested in expansion or an eager entrepreneur launching an idea - you will require a marketing plan that is strategic and tailored to the distinctive needs of your emerging business. It's important to create a plan that takes into account market dynamics, research, facts, figures and objectives to tell you how to best position yourself in the marketplace and most efficiently spend your advertising dollars and maximize your impact. Be certain your plan includes budget and implementation timelines for key elements such as tradeshows and conferences, media relations, advertising, web presence, other opportunities and on-going sales tool development. Finally, ensure there is a process in place to measure the results of your marketing plan.

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2. Create a theme

Once a plan is created, the first step to launching your new venture is a theme.

It is unarguably important to make a good first impression. In business we introduce ourselves with a single, significant graphic design that visually portrays who we are - our logo. Properly executed, it also incorporates what we do and how we do it. A well-designed, professional logo is crucial to stepping out onto the corporate stage and in permanently branding your company in the marketplace. A great logo creates instant visibility and credibility, making your company recognizable, competitive and memorable in the marketplace.

3. Choose the communication format appropriate for your industry

The plan is in place and now you have your theme represented by your logo. What's next?

Whether small or large, for a business to be successful professionally designed and fully-integrated corporate communication materials are necessary. Not only do they introduce you, they tell people who you are. Ultimately, they are the thematic foundation on which you build and grow your plan. Materials such as letterhead, envelopes, business cards, brochures, invoices, purchase orders and your website - all create your identity. And because of their repeated use and appearance, they double as a form of self-promotion. The format on which you chose to display and disperse your theme breathes life into your plan. Do not underestimate its importance. Consider what materials are appropriate for your industry.

4. Choose exceptional support

The alliances you form will determine how successfully your plans are implemented.

Consequently, you must choose wisely. How? What are the criteria?

When choosing associates, such as a graphic designer, webmaster, translator, photographer or writer, it is preferable to align yourself with someone who has the following:

Good business skills and grounded ethics

You don't want someone advising you how to run your business/venture unless they exhibit evidence that they can operate their own. Ask about their processes, goals and objectives. Are they reasonable and realistic? Ask if they belong to any related professional organizations that require specific standards of professionalism. Finally, due to the interaction and overlap of many projects, individual communication professionals are often aligned with others in related fields. Your graphic designer may have a favourite writer or webmaster; your writer may prefer to deal with a graphic designer and so on. Such alignments require the ability to work honestly with others, a sense of fair-play and level of give-and-take that is desirable in someone with whom you will be working.

Professional and pleasant character

Ultimately you need to work with someone with whom you can relate on a professional level. Do they conduct business in a pleasant, easy but professional manner? Are you able to express your views and needs? Projects can take an extended period of time and if you hit a snag you need to be able to work through it with as little difficulty as possible. If you initially feel stifled or intimidated in their presence, trust your instincts and move on.

Significant portfolio

The operative word here is significant. Your associate needn't have an endless list of high profile clients in order to meet your needs but they should have done some work of quality. Examine their portfolio, however limited, and decide if their style aligns with your requirements.

Strong marketing sense

Understanding the marketplace is imperative for proper implementation of your goals. Is your prospective associate familiar with your industry or at least able to transfer their skills and experience to your area? Ask about their previous projects or campaigns? What were the results? Were they successful? Are they able to answer why or why not?

Education

If your prospect has favourably impressed you in all criteria and has been operating a successful business for many years, you needn't eliminate them on the basis of formal education or the lack thereof. If they

are relatively new however, look for evidence that they have the educational fundamentals of their discipline required to fulfill their commitment in a professional and timely manner.

5. Consider your audience

You may not appreciate Ozzy Osbourne but someone out there is attending Ozzfest! And there's always Sharon ...

Have a plan; you've developed a great logo and are on your way to securing an excellent identity for your new business or venture. You've also developed relationships with a variety of associates who will be executing the appropriate communication materials. All the pieces of the puzzle are finally coming together. But have you considered your audience? Playing Mozart to a tie-dye crowd wouldn't necessarily fly and neither will your plan if you don't ensure it resonates with the people or industry you intend to target.

6. Consider results - at specified intervals, review your success

How am I doin' so far? Like what you hear? Make sense?

On a long road trip you would never consider getting into the car and driving to your destination without stopping several times en route to ensure you were going in the right direction. Your marketing plan is no different. Without double-checking you are headed towards your destination you may end up lost or worse - someplace you never intended, nor wish to be.

7. Continue - after success many stop and then wonder why their business loses momentum

But we used to be so close! What happened?

Sounds simple, but you'd be surprised to learn that many businesses and ventures fail due to complacency. Your plan is interactive. Do what is necessary to stay engaged, remain enthusiastic and diligent in your commitment.

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