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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

IN FOUR LETTERS: A.S.A.P. OR YOU GET FIRED

Effective communication in four letters: A.S.A.P. or you get fired

By Ivan Gurkov or our brand strategist Vankata

Ivan Gurkov has been working in the advertising industry since 2003. He has been part of a few agencies, including TBWA, The Smarts and JWT. In the recent years, he has increasingly focused on the development of present-day marketing communications and his articles on the subject have been released by various international specialized publications including Brandingmag, The Marketing Journal by Philip Kotler and Rebels and Rulers. Vankata is currently responsible for brand strategy at Interpartners Group.

The year 2021 is lying ahead. Businesses are planning how to fight for sales in the new reality of shut down markets and curtailed advertising budgets. Each category is overcrowded with competitors, consumption has shrunk and every single sale is important and must take place at once.

I am tempted to tell anybody who is concerned about their business that the way to stand out on a market saturated with offers is simply to advertise. Regretfully though, this is not true. Mass advertising serves long-term goals. In times like today however every marketing action should be bound to results which come overnight.

When a business seeks to stand out on the market and is willing to see its activities turn into quick transactions, I would recommend four simple principles for MANAGEMENT OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. I have synthesized these principles based on an everyday process of stumbling, falling and rising again amidst the new marketing reality since March 2020 – while working as a strategic consultant for the clients of the group of agencies I am employed by, as well as a communications consultant of companies in Central Europe – Slovenia, Germany and Belgium.

The principles are four and their abbreviation is four-lettered – ASAP. And ASAP is set to determine how markets are going to develop (and survive) this year.

A - Attention-grabbing offering.

This is the basis of effective communication. You have to grab the attention based on a good knowledge of your customers and with a good offer. Do not be misled to think that good advertising will make up for the lack of a tempting offer. Good ads in themselves failed to work even in the golden era of advertising. Back then Bill Bernbach remarked:

“Eighty-five percent of all ads don't even get looked at. /.../ We were worried about whether or not the American public loves us. They don't even hate us. They just ignore us.”

Even before allocating any budget for communication, think twice that in 2019, net advertising investments in Bulgaria totaled BGN 549 million. By end-2020, despite the crisis, this amount was approximately the same. Hence the relevant question: In the ocean of advertising messages, is your narrative of a brand or product simple and distinct enough to make sure that people would notice it at all?

S - Specific message.

Do not waste the time of the consumer. After you grab his attention, make sure that every second of communication, every letter of your offer brings new and worthy information for him.

Some of us still remember the TV commercial of Purlan in 1992. "I love daddy's pullover...". For its time the baby with dad's pullover was a story which was easily noticed and generated sales. At that point of time advertising songs and stories worked perfectly. But back then Purlan was among the few imported detergents on the market and maybe the only one advertised on air. Today E-mag features 743 different products in its Detergents Category alone. And by the way, most of them have an ad with a baby. That is why talking in general no longer works. To be able to sell on the market of today you need to make very clear:

- **what specific, concrete and distinct offer you have on the market;**
- **how exactly your offer will improve the lives of your potential customers.**

A - Actionable.

Your marketing proposition, your marketing activities, online content, branding and point-of-sale communication – all touchpoints should lead consumers to action. Communication is not just about praising your brand. Assign specific expectations to each channel. If you have communication in mass channels – do your banners create leads? Does your video lead people to your site? Or does it make them join your game? Does the service or rewards in your loyalty program lead customers to repurchase? Build a straightforward consumer pathway offline and online, and make sure every channel leads the consumer to a strictly defined action. In this way you can expect clear results from every touchpoint and the effect of the different elements in your marketing activity will be easily measurable.

P - Participation.

This is at the heart of present-day marketing. Today people ignore paid media. Do you remember when you last said, “Hey, this is the commercial break, and I will sit on the sofa to watch!”

Today, people perform as media. Therefore, it is of little importance what the brand will say about itself in paid media. The important thing is what people will say about the brand. Today, people are more connected than ever and communicate constantly with each other, and they are not talking about ads and brands. They talk about their lives and the world around them. So if your brand and your offer on the market claim a tangible place in people's lives, they will notice them and may even start talking about them.

Think of each and every marketing activity as an opportunity for people to join in, give a recommendation, praise or do something about your brand, together with your brand and for a cause that your brand stands by. It is a hard job to engage them but it is worth every effort, because your engaged customers will become your best ambassadors.

In conclusion:

Communication is a tool that no longer works unless it is part of consumer experience and of creating a two-way connection with consumers.

In a recent interview, Prof. Philip Kotler defined the worst mistake of marketing today: „Many companies still practice marketing as a “push” discipline“. Too much "push". Maybe it is time to try with a bit more of “pull”? Today we cannot tell people what our brand or product is. It is important what people will say about it. So the companies who adopt the new rules of the game as quickly as possible will win. ASAP.