

Remind Me Why We're Doing This Again?



by Bill Carmody

Creative? Check.
Media? Check.
Official rules?
Check. Registration?
Check. Objective? Huh?

So begins another sad, objective-less promotion. You've seen them before. Perhaps you've even worked on a couple. They start when a client calls in a panic and needs a sweepstakes up and running yesterday. Can it be done? Yes. Should it be done? Maybe.

Simply because the Internet allows us to create and launch online promotions in a matter of hours doesn't mean we should. Speed and effectiveness are not the same thing. While there is something to be said for experimentation (read: trial and error), you still need a clearly defined objective to see if your test was successful.

All too often, promotion agencies get so wrapped up in the details of the execution the client has asked for that they forget to ask a simple question: Why are we doing this promotion?

If you can't come up with a good answer, chances are that you're about to run an objective-less promotion — which is actually a contradiction in terms, since a promotion without an objective is not a promotion, but a waste of money.

So why do people waste their promotion dollars? Here are some common answers that are not good reasons for running a promotion:

- "Because my competitor is doing one."
- "It's a cool concept/technology/idea."
- "It's got great p.r. value."
- "We've got an approved budget."
- "It came down from the president/ceo."
- "We did it last year."
- "We've got an opening in our calendar."

(You can add your own lame reason here.)

Life is too short for objective-less promotions, especially since the omission can easily be rectified without much additional effort.

The promotion industry is booming right now — there's already a ton of noise competing for the attention of your target audience. "Me too" promotions are worthless, having money is not an objective, and while technology continues to advance at a tremendous pace, we should all be past the "Because We Can" rationale for launching cool promotions.

Start at the Beginning

When you consider first why you're doing something, the decision-making process throughout the remainder of the promotion becomes much simpler. If the option you've presented is on strategy — i.e., meets your objective — then it makes sense. If not, then it's detracting from what you're trying to accomplish and should be discarded.

Starting with a clear objective also helps you better determine whether or not the promotion was successful. That is to say, in order for an objective to be clear, it will include some measurable criteria in a given time frame. If the objective of the promotion is to increase sales of product X by three percent in the fourth quarter, say, then it should be easy enough to measure success when it's over.

Before you spend any money on the promotion itself, a clear objective will allow you to conduct upfront research and quickly determine what parts of the plan are compelling and which ones need help.

Even if the promotion is unsuccessful, having a clear objective will help you determine which aspects failed and what you can change in the future. But if you don't start with a clearly defined objective, it will be extremely difficult

to determine what went wrong. As the saying goes, "if you don't know where you're headed, you'll never know if you actually get there."

Too Many Cooks

At the other end of the spectrum lies a promotion with multiple and conflicting objectives. Here, a marketer identifies all the key objectives that he wants to meet, but decides to use a single promotional technique to satisfy them all. Having multiple objectives per se isn't bad, but use caution. More often than not, when a promotion has multiple objectives, it shows.

It's difficult to effectively "increase sales" when you're also trying to "drive traffic" or "reinforce brand identity." One objective usually takes precedence, and when it does, the others suffer. This is assuming that the promotion works at all. Multiple objectives can often turn a promotion into a muddled mess that contradicts itself and ultimately doesn't work for any objective.

Even when one objective doesn't take precedence over the others, the promotion can have a serious identity crisis, which can lead to the unrealistic expectation that the target audience is willing to jump through all the necessary hoops to participate. It won't.

The bottom line is that an online promotion must be simple, clear, and to the point. If there's any confusion, your targeted consumers will go about their business and ignore your offer altogether. With a single, clearly defined objective, you will ensure that your promotion stays on course, and you'll never find yourself wondering why you're doing it in the first place.

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