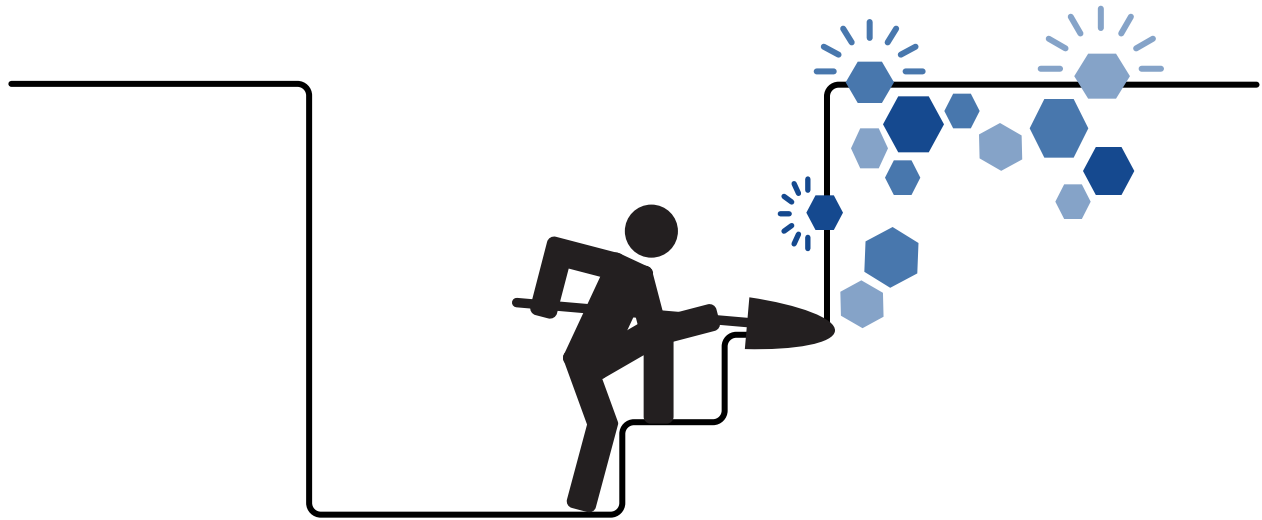


# A Marketers Guide to **Building Effective Marcom Strategies** in **Bleak Times**

HOW BRAND INTEGRITY, AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT MARKETPLACE AND CAREFULLY DEFINED OBJECTIVES CAN CARRY YOU THROUGH THE STORM.

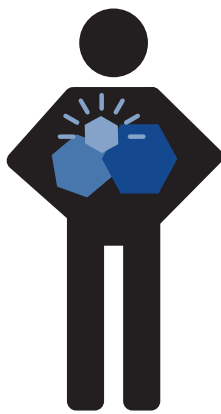
Chad Nelson, Creative Director: The Basis Group

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We're not surprising anyone by saying that times are tough right now. Money is frozen. Decision making is on-hold. Flat is the new growth pattern. Often, when the economy gets rough, businesses cut back on marketing as a quick way to free up cash. As marketing budgets disappear, it is more important than ever to make every dollar spent make sense. **Perhaps, now is the time to reevaluate your marketing plan, and decide if it makes sense in these strange economic times.**

In his February '09 article, "The Right Formula For Grabbing Market Share", Eric Hauser of Euro RSCG Impact puts forth a new business formula: "C=O2." In simple terms, it signals that chaos equals opportunity to the second power. If Hauser's formula is accurate, opportunity may be lurking just outside your door, but you need to be sure your marketing plan is poised to take advantage of it. As you move forward, keep in mind that strategy must outweigh reaction. When sales shrink, it is tempting to jump at any opportunity that appears, but that is not a viable long-term solution. Now more than ever, you must take an honest and objective view of your brand, your marketing objectives and, ultimately, your overall marketing plan.



## UNDERSTAND YOUR BRAND

It may sound obvious, but in order to effectively plot your marcom strategy you have to be clear about who you are and what you are trying to communicate, especially in an economic downturn. In this economy, people simply won't finalize a buying decision unless the value proposition is strikingly clear. The purpose of marketing is to define your differentiation and value in undeniable terms. Branding-strategy advisor Marc Rudov warns in his branding blog, *The White Noise Doctor*, that if people don't understand your brand within 15 minutes, you don't have a brand. According to Rudov, customers only understand your brand if they:

1. Identify with it.
2. Know instantly how to describe your company to their friends.
3. Never confuse your company with its competitors.

The only amendment we would add to Rudov's assessment is that you do have a brand whether you structure it or not. The internet has placed everyone center stage. Your customers have unlimited access to who you are and will form an opinion of your organization based upon whatever you are presenting—this is your brand. The key is to sculpt it into a powerful brand that meets all Rudov's criteria.

An intimate understanding of the core of your brand is one of the most valuable assets you can possess, and it is often overlooked. Without the insight of an honest brand analysis, your marketing communications are at risk of being irrelevant, unfocused and, thus, ineffective. A fully fleshed out brand analysis can be a large task that requires an honest and objective approach, but it is worth the effort. The key is to develop detailed brand definitions upon which you can build a solid, sustainable and impactful brand.

## DEFINE YOUR BRAND BUILDERS.

Carefully defined brand builders provide clear guidance on specific areas of brand development so every marketing communications project is consistent and unequivocally communicates your unique value proposition. If you remain committed to this objective, you can build solid brand equity, which becomes increasingly valuable in an economic downturn.

**Target Audience:** This is a detailed dissection of the people within a market to whom you are targeting your message. As messaging is developed, it is important to understand the needs of each of the targets and their unique position and responsibility with their company.

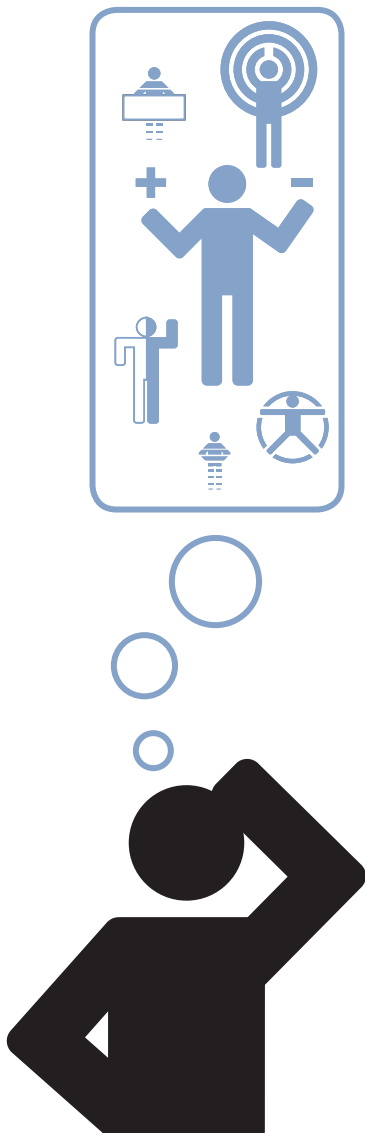
**Brand Values:** These are the standards that drive your company today as well as in the future. They are the foundation of your company and allow the brand to be leveraged into any new product or service. If your company is truly driven by the value system then your customers will trust that your complete offering will incorporate these values.

**Market Differentiators:** These define the unique characteristics of your company and its offering. These differentiators are important as potential customers compare your offering against those of your competitors.

**Value Proposition:** This is the most basic definition of the benefits your products or services provide to your customers. The value proposition provides insight to the tangible benefits of your offering as well as how your offering resonates with your customers.

**Positioning Statement:** This is a short statement that describes who you are, what you do and the prominent benefit you offer to your customers.

**Positive and Negative Attributes:** These are the constructive and destructive characteristics associated with your brand. These qualities, observations and impressions are based on both reality and perception, and they have an enduring effect on your brand.



“Your marcom strategy must draw on your true value set in order to build customer confidence...”

#### **KNOW YOUR MARKET ENVIRONMENT.**

Understanding the tenor of the marketplace has never been more important than it is right now. Many companies are redefining their objectives to accommodate the current strain on commerce. In an economic downturn, goals look different, and your marketing communications need to reflect that. Today, many companies need to prioritize customer relationships, brand stability and lead nurturing. Now is when the importance of your brand builders is most obvious. Your marcom strategy must draw on your true value set in order to build customer confidence, solidify current client relationships and turn disinterested contacts into viable sales opportunities.

#### **DEFINE YOUR KEY MESSAGING.**

Of course, this is Marketing 101, but it is a lesson that needs to be driven home again and again. In good times as well as in bad, defining key messaging is essential to the effectiveness of your marcom strategy. By creating simple, clear expressions of your brand builders in light of your current brand objectives, your overall marketing plan remains relevant and consistent.

#### **FIND YOUR WAY AGAIN.**

Most of us have given in to the temptation of reactive marketing one time or another. The marketplace shifts subtly and we jump to meet a new need. A new sales opportunity appears and we adjust our messaging to become more appealing. When the economy is healthy, chasing the money seems to make sense. The problem is that when the economy begins to ebb you are left wondering who you are exactly. This is no time to be all things to all people. With a value-focused marketing philosophy, you remain committed to your true value set and market differentiation. This approach protects you from distraction and concentrates your marketing dollars on communicating who you are and what you do best.

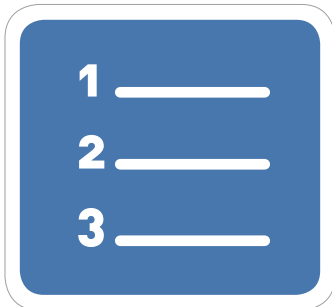
## THE SCIENCE OF EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

Effective marketing has always been an interesting mix of creativity and strategy. Really good marketing is an art form, but it is also a science. While the final marketing outcome may rely heavily on the artistic, the marketing strategy is far more left brained. An effective marketing communication strategy draws heavily on logic, definitions, objectives and long-term planning.



### DEFINE MARKET OBJECTIVES.

This is all a part of understanding the market environment, but it needs to be an independent exercise. If your goal for the year is to support the sales cycle, your marketing efforts will look quite different than if your goal is to build awareness. If you are focusing on customer relationships, your marketing focus will be different than if you want to achieve increased sales. Your objectives define your tactics so it is essential that you are clear about what you are trying to achieve.



### PRIORITIZE NEEDS IN VIEW OF BUDGET.

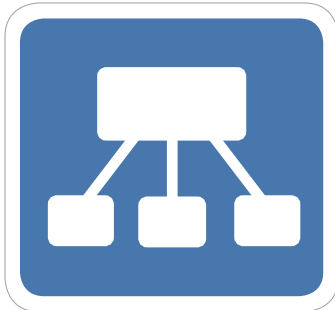
Most of us are doing our jobs with less money this year than last. That alters the way we work. Defining priorities can be a daunting task, but it is more essential now than ever. One of the most effective tools for this task is a collateral tree. It can be created in many forms, but it is essentially a diagram of all the potential marketing tools you would like to create for the year combined with a priority rating for each project and a schedule. By creating a visual of your needs, you begin to see the interrelatedness of your tools and it is more obvious what must be pursued and what may be put on hold.



### GET OUT YOUR CALENDAR.

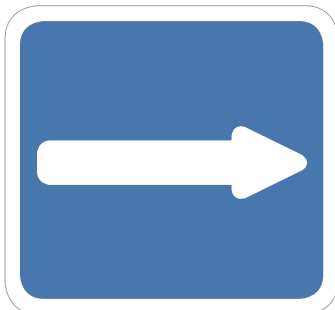
This exercise should be carried out in conjunction with prioritizing needs and creating a collateral tree. It may seem simplistic, but it is one of the easiest and most accurate methods for creating a comprehensive marketing strategy that works within your budget. Begin by plotting every major event you will face for the year, such as trade shows, shareholders meetings, user conferences, product launches, etc. Start with the most important events then

add in as many smaller events as possible. Inevitably, every event will require certain marketing tools. As you plot your events, diagram the necessary tools on the collateral tree. Suddenly, you will have a fairly fleshed out picture of your priorities for the year as well as an understanding of what needs to be forsaken for budgetary reasons. This exercise alone will help protect you from reactionary marketing.



#### **DEFINE TACTICS, EXPECTATION AND FOLLOW-UP.**

One of the biggest reasons that marketing strategies fail to achieve their objectives is that the objectives are the only part of the plan that is fully fleshed out. Whether your focus is on print advertising, social networking or direct mail, the tactics, expectations and follow-up actions need to be plotted in detail. Marketers need to remember that the goal of marketing is to nurture relationships and draw them further into the sales cycle. You need to be clear about how this is going to happen, because even the most enticing call-to-action will not get your audience to contact you as often as you would hope.



#### **COMMIT TO A LONG-TERM VIEW.**

When sales begin to dry up marketing can become increasingly knee jerk. It becomes incredibly tempting to create campaigns designed to generate quick sales. The problem is that in a tight economy, people are less likely to make any purchase that isn't obviously secure. The bottom line is that effective marketing must build long-term relationships, not capture a moment's worth of attention. As you create a marketing plan within a strained economic environment, you must fight the urge to react. You must design a strategy that prioritizes relationships in order to win the trust of your customers. Marketing must nurture and qualify a lead in order to transform disinterested acquaintances into loyal customers. This simply takes time, but it also creates a solid foundation that can sustain future slowdowns.



### **MEASURE OUTCOMES.**

In a perfect world of marketing, we could simply check our cause and effect meter to see what is working and what is not. Of course, measuring outcome on a brand recognition effort is a bit tricky. But monitoring visitors to your website, downloads of white papers, comments on your blog, and deals initiated via follow-up calls to a direct mail campaign can be accomplished. This is valuable information and essential for all future marcom strategies.

### **OPTIMISTIC FINAL THOUGHTS.**

Marketing is one of the most essential efforts any company makes. Effective marketing can be elusive, especially when budgets are short and the economy is strained. However, by investing the time to accurately define your brand and by constructing your brand strategy to reflect current marketplace dynamics, a bleak economy can positively focus your marketing efforts in a way that is effective and sustainable long term.

**ABOUT THE BASIS GROUP**

Founded in 2000, The Basis Group, Longmont, Colorado, is a marketing and brand development agency servicing the high-tech, business-to-business market. TBG has developed a proprietary branding methodology that begins by objectively defining key branding factors that act as the foundation for all organizational branding activities. TBG has successfully served such organizations as CVS/Caremark, AFS, Digital Globe, Genesys Conferencing, CS Stars, TrapTek and Premiere Systems.

**CONTACT TBG**

For more information on ideas such as thought leadership and branding in today's marketplace, feel free to contact Chad Nelson directly at [cnelson@thebasisgroup.com](mailto:cnelson@thebasisgroup.com) or 720.494.9281.