

Traditional Advertising: In the old days (meaning a generation ago), advertising was a lot simpler. You bought ad time/space on or in some combination of television, radio, newspapers, magazines and billboards (now called “outdoor” or “out of home” media). If the ads were decent and you spent enough money, people would purchase your product or service. That’s because those advertising vehicles were truly “mass” media.

Today, mass media is limited to the Super Bowl and a few other national events, which makes your job both easier and more complex. It’s more complex because of the myriad choices out there, many of which we’ve discussed in previous sections. On the other hand, it’s easier because you can zero in on your target markets in a much more efficient way, meaning the days of throwing money against the wall are thankfully over.

Still, traditional advertising has its place, and the old-school principles — such as AIDA, which stands for attention, interest, desire and action — still apply. Your imagery and messaging should strive to accomplish all four AIDA components. If an ad doesn’t capture your prospect’s attention, nothing else matters. It needs to cut through all of the clutter that bombards people every day, and you’ve got about three seconds to accomplish this task. Next, you’ve got to hold your prospect’s attention. To do this, your ad needs to be interesting. What’s more, it must stimulate a desire to purchase your offering. And finally, it needs to ask for the sale. This is where many ads fall short; they make it difficult to buy. We’ve all heard spots on the radio where the announcer motors through the phone number at a lightning clip, or websites that make it hard to find the contact page or, worse yet, force you to jump through hoops to make your purchase.

Many business owners “dabble” in advertising, trying out the neighborhood paper for a few weeks, sponsoring a little league team and sending out a few coupons to the homes in their trade area. Then they wonder why it doesn’t work. It’s because they don’t have a plan. A good advertising plan starts with your target market. The better you understand the characteristics of your most likely prospects, the more effectively you can reach them with the right offer placed in the right media at just the right time.

You also need commitment. Unless you're willing to test your plan for a minimum of three months, don't bother. Repetition and consistency are the keys. People need to be exposed to your message multiple times before responding. Think of it as training the public.

Once you understand your target market, have a good handle on your goals and establish a monthly budget, you can begin considering your traditional advertising options. Here is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Television – Still the top dog in terms of the best combination of sight, sound and credibility. Broadcast allows you to reach more people, while cable enables you to focus on lifestyle aspects of enthusiastic target audiences such as home owners, extreme sports enthusiasts or foodies. Both require a significant investment although cable is considerably cheaper. Production of your commercials adds to the cost. And modern technology (remote controls, TIVO and DVR, etc.) makes it easier to avoid commercials altogether.

Radio – The “theater of the mind” aspect of radio lets you use creativity to its full advantage. In addition, radio is an excellent way to reach consumers in their cars, meaning they are closer to the point of purchase. Like cable TV, radio lets you target specific demographics. On the downside, it's easy for people to tune out radio spots or push the button for another station. Radio advertising, particularly in large markets, can be quite expensive.

Newspapers – Big-city daily papers reach large numbers of people throughout the entire metropolitan area. But if you have a neighborhood retail store, roughly 80 percent of your customers will come from a five-mile radius. You need to beware of paying for wasted circulation. You're better off considering weekly or specialty publications that target your particular geographic locale. These papers are more affordable and allow you to run ads more often. And if you offer a coupon or other discount, you can track the results when customers redeem them.

Billboards – Outdoor advertising is best used to remind people about businesses that are already established or to inform consumers of important location information (“Last Gas for 200 Miles”). Messages need to be short and visible to reach drivers whizzing past at 70 mph. New digital technology costs less, provides sharper imagery and offers more flexibility than old-fashioned paper boards.

Yellow Pages – Fewer and fewer consumers are letting their “fingers do the walking.” Instead, they’re using the Internet to help them find what they need. Advertising in a traditional Yellow Page book can be one of your largest monthly expenses, especially when so many go directly into the recycling bin. Take a good look at Web-based options instead.

Public Relations: Did you know that as much as 70 percent of all content you read or see in the media is not written by intrepid reporters but produced by individuals or firms well-versed in the art of public relations? Public relations, and its subcategory media relations, refer to “free media” and other opportunities to present a favorable impression of your business, product, service, or of you as an expert in your field.

Studies show that a positive article or broadcast story can be ten times more believable than an ad or commercial. That’s because it leverages the credibility of the media outlet. You are not blowing your own horn; instead, a trustworthy third party is doing it on your behalf.

So how do you take advantage of opportunities to position your business, your offering or yourself in a positive light? The easiest way (although the costliest) is to retain the services of a bona fide public relations firm. Or you can learn the techniques and do it yourself. Either way, it’s helpful to know the following:

Story ideas need to be newsworthy – A ribbon cutting for a new business might garner a small photo in the local paper or Chamber of Commerce newsletter, but an

innovative business model can get you on the front page of the business section in your big city daily.

AP style is essential – The Associated Press is the organization that sets the journalistic standards for all news writing. If you write in the way that reporters, editors, and producers know and respect, it brands you as a professional, and your chances of having your story picked up increase exponentially. It's not unusual for a well-crafted story to run in its entirety in newspapers or magazines, especially smaller ones. Get a copy of the latest "AP Stylebook" and begin learning the rules of the trade today.

Relationships are also essential – At its core, pitching a news organization on the value of your idea is all about sales. And like all successful sales experiences, it comes down to your relationships with the decision-makers. Over time, if you provide them with a consistently excellent product that makes their jobs easier (and helps them look good in the process), you'll establish yourself as a trusted resource. Ultimately, they may reach out to you when they need a quote or factoid on deadline. That's a home run in the PR business.

Respect their time and professionalism – Find out how they want to be contacted. Some news people like to be reached by phone, while others prefer email. Be persistent but not obnoxious. Overly-aggressive tactics are the surest way to derail the possibility of a long-term relationship. If someone rejects your idea or story, ask (nicely) if there's another angle you could take that would work better. If it's still a no, don't take it personally. Live to fight another day.

If you do receive positive coverage, repurpose it for maximum value. Frame the story and hang it prominently in your office or waiting area. Print up copies to include in your sales kit. Post links from your website and social media outlets. It's a great way to enhance your "Google résumé," and it lives forever on the Web.

An additional area that falls under the category of public relations has been receiving much attention and buzz in recent years. It is the concept of thought leadership: positioning a person or firm so that others think of that person or company as a leader of

thought in a particular subject matter. This is not the same as being an expert, which can be accomplished through academic credentials and accomplishments. Thought leaders are determined by the public; a business or individual can only put itself in position to be adopted by the public as a thought leader.

Liz Alexander, PhD states in her book, *#THOUGHT LEADERSHIP Tweet: 140 Prompts for Designing and Executing an Effective Thought Leadership Campaign*, “Individuals and organizations call themselves “thought leaders” all the time. But what really counts is whether your clients, customers, and competitors recognize you as such.”

The traditional methods of thought leader self-promotion are to write a book or to give speeches on a topic. These are still excellent methods to improve your likelihood of being considered a thought leader, but certainly no longer the only method. Blogging, tweeting, vlogging, videos, and the countless other social network avenues are great ways to establish thought leadership.

Thought leadership can be a vital piece of a marketing strategy in many fields, from service organizations to product industries. To make a large impact as a thought leader, there must be a concerted, sustained effort and process; this is not a short-term campaign strategy. The process can include creating original content, but can also be accomplished by publishing compilations of the ideas and articles of others or starting discussion threads on Linked-in and other virtual locations.

Companies desiring to consider a thought leadership campaign should start by reading the previously mentioned book, *#THOUGHT LEADERSHIP Tweet*.

Finally, in the event that you or your business receives negative press, it may be time to hire a public relations professional. Someone who specializes in “crisis communication” can help you weather the storm with the least amount of damage. Each circumstance is different and examples of botched attempts, even among multinational corporations, political leaders, sports stars and Hollywood celebrities, are legendary.

Saying “no comment” or trying to deflect blame just adds fuel to the fire. This is no time to scrimp or attempt to do-it-yourself. After all, what’s more important than your reputation?