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The Building Blocks to Effective Marketing

By Julie Chance

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It's More than Sales and Advertising
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Whether you're a Fortune 500 company or a one person shop, to be successful, you must have a marketing strategy and you must implement it consistently. However, it doesn't have to cost a fortune and you don't have to be a creative genius.

The key is developing a marketing strategy that forms a solid foundation for your promotional efforts. Implementing promotional activities such as advertising, direct mail or even networking and one-to-one sales efforts without a marketing strategy is like buying curtains for a house you are building before you have an architectural plan. How would you even know how many curtains to buy or what size they needed to be?

You can develop a strong marketing foundation by:

Defining your product or service: How is your product or service packaged? What is it that your customers are really buying? You may be selling web-based software tools but your clients are buying increased productivity, improved efficiency and cost savings. And if you offer several products or services which ones are the most viable to promote?

Identifying your target market: Everyone or anybody might be potential clients for your product. However, you probably don't have the time or money to market to Everyone or Anybody. Who is your ideal customer? Who does it make sense for you to spend your time and money promoting your service to? You might define your ideal customer in terms of income, age, geographic area, number of employees, revenues, industry, etc. For example a massage therapist might decide her target market is women with household incomes of \$75,000 or more who live in the Uptown area.

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Knowing your competition: Even if there are no direct competitors for your service, there is always competition of some kind. Something besides your product is competing for the potential client's money. What is it and why should the potential customer spend his or her money with you instead? What is your competitive advantage or unique selling proposition?

Finding a niche: Is there a market segment that is not currently being served or is not being served well? A niche strategy allows you to focus your marketing efforts and dominate your market, even if you are a small player.

Developing awareness: It is difficult for a potential client to buy your product or service if they don't even know or remember it exists. Generally a potential customer will have to be exposed to your product 5 to 15 times before they are likely to think of your product when the need arises. Needs often arise unexpectedly. You must stay in front of your clients consistently if they are going to remember

your product when that need arises.

Building credibility: Not only must clients be aware of your product or service, they also must have a positive disposition toward it. Potential customers must trust that you will deliver what you say you will. Often, especially with large or risky purchases, you need to give them the opportunity to "sample", "touch", or "taste" the product in some way. For example, a trainer might gain credibility and allow potential customers to "sample" their product by offering free, hour long presentations on topics related to their area of specialty.

Being Consistent: Be consistent in every way and in everything you do. This includes the look of your collateral materials, the message you deliver, the level of customer service, and the quality of the product. Being consistent is more important than having the "best" product. This in part is the reason for the success of chains. Whether you're going to Little Rock, Arkansas or New York City, if you reserve a room at a Courtyard Marriott you know exactly what you're going to get.

Maintaining Focus: Focus allows for more effective utilization of the scarce resources of time and money. Your promotional budget will bring you greater return if you use it to promote a single product to a narrowly defined target market and if you promote that same product to that same target market over a continuous period of time.

Before you ever consider developing a brochure, running an ad, implementing a direct mail campaign, joining an organization for networking or even conducting a sales call, begin by mapping a path to success through the development of a consistent, focused marketing strategy.

Julie Chance is President of Strategies-by-Design, Strategies-by-DESIGN, a Dallas based firm that helps small and medium sized businesses Map A Path to Success by providing consulting, training and skills based coaching in the area of marketing strategy development. For more information go to

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Kakuro Blocks

By Earl Talbot

There is no straight up, easy way in solving kakuro puzzles. You either sweat it out, thinking of possible combinations, or do the tedious paper and pencil method. Usually, people spend more time trying to think of combinations than actually filling in the puzzles. You know the buzz people get after solving kakuro puzzles? It usually comes after a person boasts of solving his puzzle just as his friends pointed out that he got double 8's in a single block.

But there is a way to stop and prevent this kind of frustration. This is not about a miracle kakuro trick; rather, this is an age-old stand-by that few people take care to know. There are numbers in kakuro puzzles that only have a single valid combination and possibly, a limited number of cells. These number combinations and cells are called kakuro blocks. Accordingly, there are people who swear by using kakuro blocks to make puzzle-solving easier. This is not surprising since kakuro blocks shorten puzzle-solving time, thereby allowing players to solve more puzzles.

But before we get on with kakuro blocks' advantages, let us first define what they are. Kakuro blocks, simply put, is just a list of digits that provide special clues. These clues are often in the form of possible combinations. Also, these are blocks of a definite size and sum that only have a solution in terms of a single choice of digits. These blocks are reserved for a definite combination; only one valid set of digits can fill these in. Kakuro blocks come in cells that require as little as two digits or in blocks that require as many as seven or eight digits. Kakuro blocks base their combinations on the rules of the puzzles. In the puzzles, only the digits 1 to 9 can be used. Also, each number can only be used once in each sum. Consequently, each kakuro block uses only digits less than 10 and assigns each digit to combinations without repetition.

After defining kakuro blocks and their functions, let us examine the advantages of using them in solving kakuro puzzles. Since the blocks follow the rules of kakuro, the risks or possibilities of incurring mistakes are minimized. We all know that an unnoticed mistake in a kakuro puzzle leads to other mistakes, especially if the wrong block is not isolated. Basing other answers on a wrong block or digit often causes problems in solving the puzzles and can eventually lead to redoing the whole thing. Thus, more time and effort are wasted.

Kakuro blocks also save time. Since the blocks provide the only legit combinations for some sums, players only need to identify the digits' correct positions. The blocks also enable the use of techniques such as "unique intersects", "locked values", and "reducing combination". In using "unique intersects", the player only has to look for kakuro blocks with shared cells. Logically, the common number of both blocks is positioned inside the shared box. "Locked values" refer to isolating block values. "Reducing combination" is usually employed if a non-kakuro block intersects with kakuro blocks. Since the non-kakuro block has many possible combinations, crossing kakuro blocks limits the choices. With these tricks, solving kakuro puzzles is a cinch.

Indeed, solving kakuro puzzles is easier with kakuro blocks. They minimize mistakes and shorten solving time. In addition, they are also easy to memorize. In fact, the more frequent you use these blocks, the more you would be familiar with them. Thus, memorizing them takes no time at all. These

blocks are also very easy to find; just browse through any site that offers kakuro puzzles and solving strategies.

For more valuable information on kakuro puzzles, please visit

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