

Your Customer's Marketing Campaign

Customers Need Support from Suppliers

The golden rule for becoming an effective part of your customer's marketing plans: Treat their resources and time the way you would want your resources and time to be treated.

BY SID CHADWICK

Historically, my biases include that most suppliers do not know their target customer's business model. By *business model*, I mean issues relating to performance objectives and priorities; sources of pain; culture and values; and ambitions. However, that condition is changing as:

- ▶ Customers' senior managements are becoming more demanding of preferred suppliers, and
- ▶ Enlightened suppliers' senior managements understand they must be proactive with target customers.

Issues to Investigate and Understand

To become proactive with target customers, and especially in support of their marketing programs, the following is an informal, beginning "discovery list" for readers to pursue.

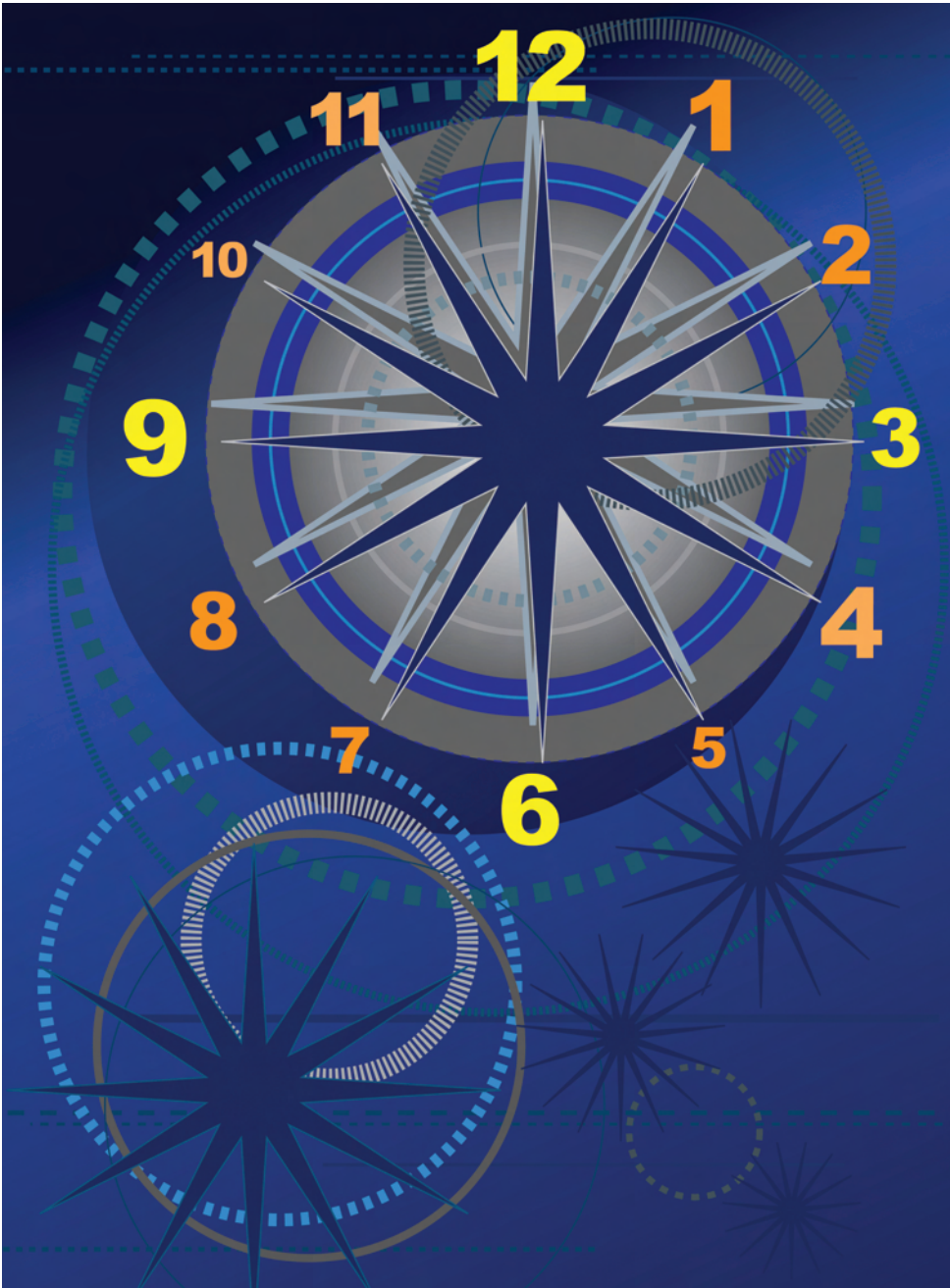
Differentiation: The core of any organization's market presence is its differentiation. In other words, what is it that customers want that separates you from your competition? Answers can vary widely and include profile of customers, product and service offerings, employees, and even use of technology—to offer but a few examples. Correctly define your target account's differentiation and you are on your way to being able to contribute to their marketing plans.

Culture and Values: Every organization has a culture and set of values. Some organizations wear them on their sleeves and others are more subtle. For

instance, there's a huge difference in culture between Southwest Airlines and U.S. Airways. The same can be said for McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken, (aka KFC). Certainly, there are numerous qualities that are similar, but what do the different organizations work to achieve with each customer? The rationale for defining these issues is that you want to preserve—even enhance—what your customer has worked toward and invested deeply into as part of creating their identity.

Historical Performance (for your target account and their industry): Every company and its industry has a track record of performance. And that track record is dependent on environmental factors you need to understand. For instance, the farm equipment market is dependent on worldwide agricultural prices, value of the U.S. dollar relative to other currencies and weather conditions. The commercial airline industry is dependent on the price of oil, consumer travel habits, and discretionary income. Learn your target account's historical performance relative to their industry. It will be helpful in discussions, and with suggestions you eventually will bring forward.

Recently Published Articles: In other words, do your homework. Research what's been published that includes a mention of or information about your target account. Go back at least six months to a year. If your target account's number one or two competi-



Photographer: Khwi, Agency: Bigstockphoto.com

If your objective is to contribute to and become a part of your customer's marketing efforts, you must become conversant with the issues, and then stay conversant as conditions change.

tors also are mentioned, be sure to read those pieces closely, because the odds are good that there are contrasts drawn by your writer, and these understandings need to be explored—even confirmed.

Business Development Strategy: Every organization has a business development strategy by which it goes about developing and retaining business (though it may be informal). Most business development strategies evolve over time, and represent some form of acceptance by the host organization—that's habitual. If we accept that the current business development strategy is less than perfect, then we can stand back and critically review:

- ▶What's happening,
- ▶What's not happening as it should, and
- ▶What should be different?

Many times current employees of the target account know what should be improved as a business development strategy but either haven't been asked, are new as an employee, or fall somewhere in between. Whatever the case, somewhere in this mix is the question, "Does anyone want what we do for customers to be different, and improved?"

Sources of New Business: Sources of new business are too seldom tracked or recognized for what's different. Most of the clients we work with were origi-

nally unaware that approximately one-third of their new customers in the last five years came to them through referrals—and often from supplier referrals. Qualitative issues should be studied. For instance, are additional dollars coming from current or new customers? Are most of the new customers coming from one sales representative or CSR or from one geographical location? Or, are the new accounts coming from one vertical market or are they asking for one particular product or program? These are the types of changes and issues that an outsider—partly because they are one step removed—may be able to discern more easily than the good folks who work with the information daily.

Causes of Lost Business: Not all organizations systematically study the cause of lost business, but they should. There are almost always multiple causes, therefore, an intuitive sense of curiosity in pursuing this type of information can be helpful for putting together a complete picture for assisting your target account's marketing efforts.

Sources of Pain: Most organizations have what might be termed an Achilles heel—that quality or condition that is perceived as keeping them from accomplishing their objectives and goals. Voiced sources of pain may be real, or imagined, so you need to have a quiet sense of critical objectivity. For instance, General Motors would like to promote that its health care costs are keeping it from being profitable, but

Toyota isn't selling more cars and gaining market share practically every month because it has lower prices—it doesn't—or lower health care costs.

Performance Objectives and Priorities: What are your target account's objectives and goals? Is there a strategic plan, and what does it say? Understanding these performance-related issues are critical to your becoming proactive and perceived as competent in eventual discussions regarding your target account's marketing efforts.

Missed Opportunities for New Business: Most organizations don't track "missed opportunities for new business." It usually happens at the front line, and my personal experience is that it occurs far more often than anyone cares to imagine. If you are fortunate

enough to find a few key employees with this type of information, you want to pursue learning as much as you can. Sometimes, there's an immediate gold mine waiting to have the lid blown-off; certainly discretion is needed in terms of how you discuss such opportunities. Ultimately improved performance for your target account is what you want to be known for in order to become a viable part of their marketing program.

Customer Complaints: Few organizations capture and track this type of information. It should be captured at your customer's front line, which includes delivery people, receptionists, customer service reps, bookkeepers, and certainly sales people. Customer complaints represent a gold mine, but someone has to eventually mine it.

Customers Want Suppliers Who Can Think

Now some may think, "That's too easy, and how do I become a part of my target account's marketing program after learning all that?"


My consistent experience is that your customer's senior management wants suppliers who can think, and contribute to their performance. And, too many suppliers in our great industry are reactive—rather than proactive—with their target accounts, which results from not having done one's homework.

If your objective is to contribute to and become a part of your target accounts' marketing efforts, then you must become conversant with the issues, and then stay conversant as conditions change. Your target has neither the time nor the temperament to educate and train you.

When you become conversant to your target account's business model, you become equipped to assist and collaborate proactively, and effectively in their marketing efforts. *However, without background information and understanding of your target account, you are a nuisance, a barnacle, a pox on your target account's resources.*

Respect Customer's Time and Resources

The golden rule for becoming an effective part of your target account's marketing plans: treat their resources and time the way you would want your resources and time to be treated.

Such resources are precious, hard-earned, and limited. And frequently, you only have one opportunity to make a great first impression and contribution. Don't waste it! 



Your customer's senior management wants suppliers who can think and contribute to their performance. Too many suppliers are reactive—rather than proactive—with their target accounts, which results from not having done one's homework.