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BRAND IS FROM MARS, DIRECT IS FROM VENUS: HOW TO MAKE THE MARRIAGE WORK

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Editor's Note: This article is based on a presentation made by Andrew Cohen and Leo Toralballa at the Professional Insurance Marketing Association (PIMA) MarkeTTechSM Symposium.

Instead of motivating each other, the brand, direct, promotion, Web and PR divisions continue to speak of their own language and act in their usual ways.

John Gray, author of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, gives us hope that even when we perceive the same problem differently, we can still make things work. The marketing industry should consider adopting Gray's thinking in bridging brand advertising with direct response.

In theory, every advertiser wants brand advertising with a built-in ROI. Yet often the brand manager in a company perceives the direct marketing director of the same company to be from a different planet. And vice versa. After all, each has a separate budget and agenda with bonuses doled out according to their individual gains. Different mindsets blur a unified vision.

To help the team build that bridge, it's important to challenge the team to verbalize the balance between the role of brand and response in the advertising campaign. We call this the B/R (brand and response) ratio.

In a perfect world, the balance is 50/50 where brand-driven messages are followed by a call to action of equal length to spur sales. A recent GEICO ad that offered a 15 percent reduction on auto insurance to consumers who made a 15-minute phone call is one such example. In reality, however, most marketers do not adhere to this formula. For instance, prescription

pharmaceutical ads use a B/R ratio of 70/30; 70 percent of the advertising focuses on the brand, 30 percent on the response. The hard core direct response ads for products like the AB Flex 2 employ a 1/99 B/R ratio.

A case in point is the work done for Fortis Health (FH). FH is the largest national issuer of individual health insurance, but because its products were always sold through a network of independent agents, it had no general consumer recognition. So, when Fortis decided to add direct marketing to its armory of marketing methods, it faced a significant challenge—how to persuade consumers to trust their healthcare to a company of which they've never heard.

The solution: to make sure that, in addition to classic direct marketing techniques such as providing multiple opportunities to contact Fortis and describing product benefits, the prospective customer also had to be provided with reasons to trust Fortis. In other words, a B/R ratio had to be established (in this case 40/60) that all involved parties agreed to and reflected their respective visions. This was accomplished by emphasizing things like the age of the company (more than 110 years), the number of people who are currently Fortis customers (more than 1 million) and the breadth of its products (designed to meet a broad variety of needs from short-term insurance to permanent).

This advertising was paid out of a direct marketing budget, so it had to justify every dollar spent in terms of new business written, but in the long term, it was designed to build a new consumer brand in a highly complex and competitive market and make later sales—whether direct or agent-driven—easier to accomplish. These are achievable goals, but only if strategies share a vision that closes the gap between brand and response.

Brand may be from Mars and Direct may be from Venus. But given the transition in the economy, consumer behavior and technology, companies that don't attempt to marry brand and response by establishing a B/R ratio are going to end up alone, in another solar system. ■



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