

Precision Communications: The '3Ms of Marketing'

The best way to illustrate the technique of using the 3Ms of Marketing most effectively is to use a true story.

Julie, a jeweller, asked me for some [marketing advice](#). With a limited budget for marketing communications, she couldn't decide whether to invest in a better website or in a printed brochure to promote her products. She asked my advice about this dilemma.

In my workshops I ask the question that Julie asked me. Some workshop participants argue in favour of a website, saying that it's more versatile and can be updated more frequently with new products or prices. Others argue in favour of a printed brochure, because it can more accurately illustrate the jewellery on sale. In other words, a discussion ensues and we take a vote.

The problem is that Julie's question was the wrong question.

Julie's question focused on the medium, not the message or the market segments. Sometimes a marketing consultant's job is to question the question, or reframe the problem. And so that's what I did. I asked Julie about her business and the different types of jewellery she made. I also asked her about her existing customers, sales patterns, pricing, distribution methods, and other aspects of her enterprise.

Julie's business was relatively simple. She designed and manufactured fine silver jewellery, and she also made brightly coloured acrylic jewellery. She loved both products equally and both were products of her creativity, skill and labour. In telling me about her customers they fell broadly into two camps: wealthy middle-aged ladies and teenage girls. Obviously, the customers for fine silver jewellery were wealthy middle-aged ladies, and she sold brightly coloured acrylic jewellery to teenage girls.

In many ways she had two businesses. Looking at her business from her own point of view, from the inside, it was one integrated business. She had one workshop, one business name, and one bank account. However, looking at her business from the customers' point of view, it was two different businesses. This is a crucial distinction to make.

I worked with Julie using the 3Ms of Marketing technique...

Firstly we looked at the fine silver jewellery. What was the market? Clearly it is wealthy middle-aged ladies. Secondly, I asked about the message we want to convey to this audience about this product. By tightly controlling the questions in this way, we generated good answers – ‘elegant’, ‘exclusive’, ‘handmade’, ‘expensive’, ‘classic’ – appropriate keywords to craft our message around. These words were at the heart of what we wanted to say. Thirdly, we considered the medium. What was the most appropriate medium to deliver our message of elegance to those particular customers?

To decide this, we have to understand the customer – we have to look at the world from their point of view. What are their habits? How do they behave? What are their preferences? Who are their friends? Who has their trust? Whom do they believe? Let’s go and ask them... As a result, we came to the conclusion that perhaps the most appropriate medium to convey this message is a feature or advertisement in one of the glossy lifestyle magazines that these ladies are known to read. These magazines fit with their own image and preferences. And so, having considered this product, identified its markets, and crafted a message, we concluded that the best medium to convey the message is an advert or editorial feature in one of these magazines.

Then we moved on to the second product, brightly coloured acrylic jewellery. Again, using the 3Ms of Marketing technique, we asked firstly about the target market for these bangles and necklaces, and we know that the customers are teenage girls. Next we moved on to the message. I asked about the keywords we’d use to communicate our product to teenage girls. ‘Fun’, ‘inexpensive’, ‘colourful’ and ‘cool’, are the words that this question provoked. Finally we come to the third M, the medium. What’s the most appropriate medium to convey this message to teenage girls? We’re forced to imagine how teenage girls behave, their lifestyles, and the media they use and trust. Framing the question in this way, we conclude that social media such as Facebook, Twitter and text messages are the most appropriate media to use.

This is a simple example of the effectiveness of the ‘3Ms of marketing’ technique. Market, Message and Medium – crucially, in that order. By considering each of the 3Ms in the right order, we’re guided into making the right decisions about marketing communications.

Firstly, select the target markets. Or more precisely, the different target markets that apply to any one particular product or service. So for each product, we might list four or five targeted market segments.

Secondly, for each market segment, decide on the marketing message. (At this stage, just the heart of the message, keywords etc. Precise copywriting can be done later.) Note that it's possible – and indeed probable – that even for the same product we need different messages for different market segments. For example, some people will buy a product because of its comfort and another type of customer might buy the very same product because of its style.

Finally, we need to consider the most appropriate medium, or media, to convey each message to its target audience. Again, depending on the audiences we're targeting, we might choose different media to deliver the same message (or a different one) to different types of customer.

This methodology ensures that we design clear and precise communications with each target audience, for each product or service. In writing a marketing communications plan using the 3Ms, we end up with a plan based on precise 'straight lines', rather than a tangle of different messages being fired in all directions towards different types of customer.

I use this methodology in my training workshops and in my consultancy work with clients. First of all I use case studies and examples from other kinds of businesses in order to illustrate how the technique works.

One of the reasons that the 3Ms technique works so well is that it forces us to consider the medium to be used in conveying marketing communications, only after we've decided on the target audience and the message. Without using 3Ms, what often happens is that the medium is decided too early in the process. It may be, for example, that there's an enthusiasm to use social media, or a special offer at the local print shop tempts us to produce leaflets, or we select a radio advertisement because we were impressed by how effective this medium was for another business.

This is how marketing communications go wrong so often. Leaflets are produced without being clear where we'll distribute them – the distribution question comes last because it is the last element of the physical process of design-print-distribution. In fact, the process should start with the audience and, consequently, we should know who we're addressing from the very beginning. We then work 'backwards' to deciding the message for that particular audience and, lastly, decide on the vehicle to convey that message to those people. By doing it this way we come to much more useful conclusions about the medium to be employed.

"Easy! Obvious! It's just common sense!"

That's what my workshop participants say. My retort is that their new conclusions are totally different than their initial answers! I remind them that earlier they were saying why a colour brochure might be the best thing to do, or advocating a better website as a preferable medium.

It's only because they were guided by the 3Ms of marketing technique, one question at a time, in a logical order, that they came to conclusions arising from the 3Ms that make perfect sense. Without the 3Ms they were being imprecise, discussing the merits of various media in general, without considering them in the context of Julie's particular business, her products, and her target markets.

If we are to use our resources cost-effectively – if we're to be clear to ourselves and to our customers, and if we want to increase sales and profits – then we need to be precise about our marketing communications. The 3Ms of marketing technique is a simple but highly effective methodology to help us achieve that precision.

Key Points

The 3Ms technique forces us to think through marketing communications in the right order: Market, then Message, and then Medium.

What to do next

Use the 3Ms technique to review your own marketing communications.

This is an extract from David Parrish's marketing book **'Chase One Rabbit: Strategic Marketing for Business Success. 63 Tips, Techniques and Tales for Creative Entrepreneurs'**.

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