

The “POW!” Method

Choosing Ad Media for Maximum Success

By Alex Hiam

“Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell, and advertise.”

That’s the personal motto of Gertrude Boyle, the feisty chairman of Columbia Sportswear.

Good idea. But how? If only she’d make clear whether to advertise in magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, Web search engines, or some other medium.

Well, I’m here to tell you that the best medium is . . . whatever works! Sometimes you can make your point more effectively or cheaply in radio or outdoor display ads than you can in print. And sometimes the movement and realism of TV is just what you need to make the maximum impact (remember that local cable markets can offer inexpensive TV advertising, if you’re a smaller business). So you need to be ready to master whatever medium your program demands.

Although most companies and programs emphasize a single medium as their primary one, exceptions to that rule exist. Sometimes spreading your advertising across several media equally (more or less) makes more sense.

You want to use multiple media whenever maximizing the number and variety of exposures is essential. When you have to hit the target over the head with your message, a multi-channel “POW!” approach may be just the style you need.

This approach gives you more points of influence, and you get to vary your message to avoid losing the target’s interest. Perhaps you can lead with print ads, but pulse with a strong radio campaign — and reinforce the whole campaign with broad-exposure outdoor advertising to make sure that everybody knows your brand name and its positioning.

And how about adding an active Web site and a telephone call center to increase your one-on-one interactions with customers and prospects? Complete programs like this active approach to customer interaction deliver high impact and can accomplish multiple marketing goals. But you

have to become versatile — able to work well in multiple media.

You can use radio, TV, posters, billboards, transit buses, subway signs, T-shirts, flags, calendars, even boat sails to communicate marketing messages.

When I first lived in San Francisco, I often saw a tall sailboat on the Bay with “Esprit” emblazoned across its sails. And I see that marketers now display small billboards on the chair lifts at many ski resorts. (Would you advertise beverages on these lifts, or would disability insurance be more realistic?)

You have many options (and you get more every day), and your creativity can lead you to fresher and less-cluttered media than the traditional forms. Anything may go, if you can find a way to make the medium work.

The trick to designing these multi-channel advertising programs is to make sure you have the timing and exposure worked out so that they really do add up to a strong, visible, burst of advertising: a “POW!” that demands attention, even if only for a day or week.

Sometimes, however, I recommend achieving this “POW!” effect by sticking with only one medium, so that you can spend all your budget on it and be “bigger” in it. I do this in my corporate training business. Sometimes we will cut all mailings, do no trade shows or conferences, and just invest heavily in our Web site for a month - posting special offers and promotions, emailing customers to draw their attention to the offers, and buying a high position with the search engines to drive traffic to the site.

By cutting back on everything else, we can afford to make a big “POW!” on the Web for the month, even though we aren’t as big as some of our rivals.

Whatever you approach make sure you are “pulsing” with a coordinated, powerful campaign that says “POW!” in mile-high letters across the comic-book page. When you market, you want everyone to listen!