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So you want to make a big marketing splash?

A \$2.6 million ad during the Super Bowl?

Marketers love attention. And it's hard to resist the big media buy. It's fun and it's easy.

Just think about it. People line up to buy 30 seconds on the Super Bowl for \$2.6 million. Even people who have no business there. (And I mean that literally: no business.)

To be fair, it can seem like a great idea on the surface. After all, everyone in the world will hear about your brand. How cool is that?

However, putting your product on a billboard in Times Square rarely is a good way to make money for your business. You have to ask yourself whether you want millions of eyes on your company brand, or would you prefer thousands of new customers?

Here's the key. Build your brand customer by customer; rather than trying to become an overnight sensation.



Let me be clear. I'm not saying we shouldn't advertise at all or that advertising can't get you new customers. Many, many products must be mass marketed. It's far cheaper to reach the whole audience for soda, fast food, blue jeans, shampoo and cleaning products with a big advertising campaign. Finding the casual beer-drinkers of the world on a targeted list would be a futile exercise.

So we have to resist the temptation to take the easy way out. When someone — an agency, a media planner, a friend — says to you, "I know how you could get a huge audience," you need to listen with a skeptical ear. Big isn't always a mistake, but neither is big always better.

We tend to waste more than we should. Marketing is about hitting the right target group with the right message. If you hit a lot

MARKETING WISE



Spyro Kourtis



of the wrong people, you'll pay for it. You need to consider whether you have focused your target correctly. I know some business owners who think their target audience is much broader than it actually is. We think everyone should hear about our product. Maybe they'll need it later and remember us. Maybe they'll recommend our service to a friend someday. But that's unlikely.

As my rule of thumb, if you can't picture half the population buying either your product or a direct competitor, you'll have to do more work to create a rational marketing plan. And, by the way, I use the word "buying" your product deliberately. If you sell paper, everyone who works in an office uses it every day, but only one person there makes the buying decision.

Step one is clearly defining your target. Step two is figuring out where they hang out so you can build your plan around your market. You'll want to know if they watch a particular TV program or cable channel or whether they read specific magazines. Do they subscribe to an e-newsletter? Are they located in a particular geographical area? If they ride the bus, consider bus cards.

Then you build your plan. In direct marketing, we're used to thinking about mail and e-mail. But other media such as direct response TV, can be measured — even when you don't have the target market's name and address. And that's why those media are great opportunities for marketers, because when you measure response, you learn what works

for you and what doesn't. It's addictive. The more you know, the more you want to know. Sooner or later, unless your product is meant for the masses, those big media buys aren't as tempting.

Avoiding the big splash mentality has other benefits. Because splashes are often very expensive, you should have more budget for hitting your target group more frequently. That also means you spread your risk over time. If your perfect customer just wasn't at that big event you sponsored, you lost her. Or if your big splash promotion happened to hit during a storm, you might lose half your audience.

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When you have a limited marketing budget, you don't want to miss out by putting too much of your money into one expensive idea.

Here's the key. Build your brand customer by customer, rather than trying to become an overnight sensation. You can't pay the bills with awareness. You need to sell something. Think of Capital One and the powerhouse they've become in financial services. They started by using targeted direct mail. Now you see them using television commercials ("What's in your wallet?") to reinforce their message.

If you're in business for the long term, this is the safest strategy, and, I'd argue, the most effective way to build your product's brand.

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