

It's A "Brand" New World For PCOs

Even small PCOs should invest in a marketing message, without a specific sell

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

I just got back from the CTAM (Cable and Telecommunications Association for Marketing) conference in Philadelphia. It was incredibly well attended. Over 1,200 marketing executives from franchise operators, programmers and vendors were there. They heard presentations on many key issues in our marketplace today such as IPTV, how to profit from video on demand, bundling digital voice, and enhancing the broadband experience.

This conference was loaded with rooms filled with product managers, brand experts, marketing gurus, and advertising executives anxious to hear how some of the largest MSOs are tackling today's marketplace challenges.

The bottom-line message from this event was that the cable industry has really matured in its approach to marketing, branding and selling. In fact, Dena Malsom of Cox Communications noted in her presentation "there was almost a 40 percent jump from 2003 to 2004 in ad spending among cable companies."

You may have seen some of these TV spots over the past year too as they have invaded the airwaves. Many of these ad dollars are being spent by large franchise operators to build the brand, sell the bundle, and convert back a dish subscriber.

Building the Brand

The key focus of the MSOs' ad spending has been on "building the brand." Cox Cable calls itself "your friend for the digital age." Time Warner tells customers "now anything's possible." And Charter wants you to "get hooked." Each of the large MSOs is focusing on improving its brand image so that customers feel more comfortable buying from them.

And it is clearly working. The fran-

chise operators have seen their brand perceptions improve on recent J.D. Power & Associates research studies. And they've seen a positive movement in subscriber numbers as well. Cox reports that presentation rates have doubled since it began branding its "bundled products."

So what marketing is done by PCOs? I know we don't have the resources that a Cox or Time-Warner may have to boost our brand recognition, but we can still focus on this crucial element of our business plan.

Many people in our industry have historically mistaken "marketing" for "selling." They may think that pursuing the right-of-entry agreement with a property owner is marketing, or asking a CSR to up-sell a customer is marketing. Actually, marketing is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "the commercial processes involved in promoting and selling and distributing a product or service." In other words, it is the accumulation of all the interactions between your company and your customer.

Your brand is being built (or torn down) based on everything your customer sees and hears, from the first impression when he sees your brochure in the leasing office to the quality of the installation process completed by the service technician. All of these transaction points impact your brand image.

It's all in a Name

Historically, I do not think that PCOs have taken the same approach to marketing that was apparent at CTAM last week. Some PCOs do not consider their brands to be important components of their business model. This is apparent when you consider how many companies simply call themselves "Digital Services" or "Satellite Systems." De-

veloping a brand should create interest, project uniqueness and instill confidence.

The marketing of your message should be wrapped around your brand. My company's brand is "MediaWorks" and we use it on all of our communication. Our broadband product is SpeedWorks; our digital voice service is called VoiceWorks. And our comprehensive cable package is called The Works! All of our products are geared to enhancing the MediaWorks brand in the eyes of our customer.

Branding occurs in other ways, too. Your lineup cards, on-site community channels, door hangers, bill-stuffers, direct mail, sign up forms are all part of your marketing.

Your technician's trucks, uniforms, and paperwork are also part of the marketing and branding process. And nowadays, so is everything you present at your website.

This was the key message sent at CTAM. Your message is crucial in this competitive, cluttered environment. We all must focus on our brand. Create a simple, meaningful communication to the marketplace about what you offer, and why you are different, and special.

PCOs need to take the advice of attendees at CTAM, and put resources behind their marketing effort. Enhancing your "brand" can lead to "brand new" opportunities. **BBP**

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