

Act Like a Guerilla to Beat a Gorilla

Creative marketing often wins out against companies with unlimited ad budgets

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

When a gourmet coffee shop on the West Coast recently wanted to boost its afternoon traffic, it went to a local advertising agency for ideas. “Since we have such a small budget, maybe we should just run a few radio commercials to boost our afternoon business,” the shop owners told the agency.

Fortunately for the shop, its ad agency had a much better idea. The coffee shop used its small budget in a creative way, by hiring marching bands to provide neighborhood “wake-up” calls. The shop also passed out coupons to local offices to encourage afternoon visits. And guess what? It worked.

Thinking like a “guerilla marketing guru” rather than a gorilla can help businesses with modest budgets beat out the big guys. This can happen in any industry, including ours. Guerilla marketing is defined as “unconventional marketing intended to get maximum results from minimal resources.” It is more about matching wits than matching budgets. Guerilla marketers use their limited resources for maximum impact.

We’re all competing against an 800 pound gorilla in our markets, whether it is Comcast, Time-Warner, Verizon or SBC/AT&T. We’ll never have the advertising or marketing dollars that they have to generate increased sales. So we have to use the tactics of guerilla marketing to win.

Not Pepsi. Not Coke.

Having a small budget for marketing can actually make a company more effective and resourceful in its efforts. For instance, consider the incredible amount of money spent by Coke and Pepsi to advertise, promote and sell their newest brands. The launch campaigns from these 800 pound soft-drink gorillas cost hundreds of

millions of dollars, and the best they can come up with is Pepsi One and Coke Zero? Geniuses.

So I am confident that effective marketing can be done without the same level of marketing resources as the giants.

Look what the creative types at the 800 pound cable TV gorillas have done to boost sales revenue in recent years. With all the resources in the world, their best weapon has been to send direct marketing pieces with short-term discounts to existing customers.

Are you kidding? “Three months of savings” is the best marketing message you have to convert a DSL user to cable? Winning on price is a short-term strategy. A problem bigger than the promotion is the cable company’s reaction when you respond with a “yes, sign me up.” The gorilla tells you that their next available date is a week from Tuesday. And of course, they don’t mention the post-promotional price in their marketing pieces.

Well, they are certainly successful in communicating that they are truly a slow-moving gorilla stomping on their customers.

Luckily, private cable operators have the opportunity to think more like the small gourmet coffee shop.

So we should use our limited resources in unique and creative ways to earn a new customer, or trade up an existing one. But how do we act like a guerilla in our marketing warfare?

Try On-site Events

Some of the best ideas I have heard from PCOs involve “on-site events” to get the prospects’ attention. I cannot tell you how many orange juices and donuts MediaWorks has handed out over the years at the front of an apartment community to create awareness of a new service such as

broadband or digital voice.

Or, door-to-door marketing to immediately sign up and then install non-users.

Other PCOs have told me examples about incentive campaigns with on-site leasing staffs (with properties competing against each other), as well as converting their call-center to an outbound telemarketing team. More recently, PCOs have been effective using their individual community channel to introduce and promote new services to trade up existing customers.

Our favorite guerilla plan is to use our service technicians to find opportunities to upsell subscribers to new services. Techs are very effective at promoting broadband when they see a computer in the house, or HD service when they see a high-def TV. Think about it. You actually have your own salesperson inside your prospect’s apartment. This is better than the Avon lady.

None of those plans take a significant amount of resources. They only require your staff’s energy and commitment, and it is a great way to build a strong first impression.

Our customers’ minds are cluttered with marketing messages from everyone on TV, radio, billboards, direct mail. We don’t have the same marketing and advertising budget as others, so we must outwit (not outspend) our competition. And that means targeting other tools – our own channels, our own people, our own installers, to drive up penetration.

I also wonder if I could get a marching band to visit some of my properties. **BBP**

About the Author

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