

Has Your Marketing Message Changed with the Times?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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People have changed in dramatic ways over the past five years, and businesses should take that into consideration this holiday season, says one public relations expert.

“As people’s values change, so do their shopping habits. To market effectively, businesses should be aware of how their prospective customers have changed,” says Marsha Friedman, CEO of EMSI Public Relations (www.emsincorporated.com) in Wesley Chapel, Fla.

Shoppers are fussier, and while recessionary budget concerns are one reason for that, thrift is not the only value affecting consumer choices, Friedman says.

“Some stem from personal issues. Take me, for instance. As I grow older, I view many more material things as clutter. I want to get rid of the junk in my life and focus on important things,” she says.

Friedman is a baby boomer – a group that makes up 26 percent of the U.S. population.

“I’m sure I’m not the only person experiencing a change in how I view material goods, what’s ‘clutter’ and what’s meaningful,” she says.

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Other changing values have arisen from global concerns, such as the world's reliance on oil, growing environmental issues, and whether goods were manufactured here or abroad, she says.

"Businesses that want to cash in on holiday shopping can set themselves apart with a message that appeals to their audience's changing values," Friedman says.

Here are her tips for developing a new marketing approach that's in sync with the times:

- Identify what makes your product appealing to customers' values. If your homemade soaps are produced right here in the U.S.A., brag about it! In a recent poll, 90 percent of us rated "keeping jobs in America" as the No. 1 step the government can take to help us economically. Many shoppers have friends or family members who are unemployed or underemployed; that makes for a greater appreciation of businesses that create jobs here at home. Your "made in America" label is valuable! Does your packaging use recycled materials – or is it recyclable? There are now 69 percent of us recycling, according to a National Geographic poll. Does your manufacturing process use a renewable energy source? More than half of us think it's more important to develop alternative sources of energy than to find more oil.

- Become an expert. You can gain valuable media exposure for your company or product by positioning yourself (or your spokesman) as an industry expert with useful information to share. For instance, if you're highlighting the fact that your product is made in America because you to help put Americans to work, offer them suggestions based on your experience. What are skills employers value? What are the biggest mistakes applicants make during interviews?

- Which channels will be best for getting your message out? Where does your audience get its news and entertainment? Are they using social media? Reading the newspaper? Listening to radio or watching TV? Or a mix of all four? On social media, you can share your expertise by offering useful information and links to resources, and engaging in conversations. Print is a great medium for providing consumer tips, as is TV, which is also perfect if your message has a visual component. Talk radio shows look for debate and information that solves problems. On social media, you can build a following of fans who help spread your message, while

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mentions in (or appearances on) traditional media will give you the implied endorsement of journalists and talk show hosts.

- Choose a messenger who's accessible. If you're the CEO and the person best qualified to be interviewed by journalists and show hosts, you may be the perfect spokesperson. But if you're so busy you can't drop what you're doing to respond to interview requests, you will lose valuable media opportunities. Your messenger should be a person who is well-versed on the chosen area of expertise – and available at the drop of a hat.

If your message hasn't changed with the times, Friedman says, now is a good time to think about your company or product in a new light.

"If you look at it from the shoppers' perspective, you may just see something that appeals to consumers' changing values," she says. "Turn that into a message that resonates with potential customers and you may just have your best holiday ever.

About Marsha Friedman

Marsha Friedman is a 22-year veteran of the public relations industry. She is the CEO of EMSI Public Relations (www.emsincorporated.com), a national firm that provides PR strategy and publicity services to corporations, entertainers, authors and professional firms. Marsha is the author of *Celebritize Yourself: The 3-Step Method to Increase Your Visibility and Explode Your Business* and she can also be heard weekly on her Blog Talk Radio Show, *EMSI's PR Insider* every Thursday at 3:00 PM EST.