



Marketing Technology in a Downturn: A Practical Guide to Getting More for Less

Author: Aimee L. Quemuel, founder of Ventaja Communications, a network of public relations and marketing communications consultants based in San Francisco.

Summary: A step-by-step guide to surviving an economic downturn with your marketing job, and perhaps your budget, intact.

Article:

Companies in all sectors have been significantly affected by the poor economy; however, for an early stage technology company, the lackluster economy can mean the difference between life and death.

According to Steve Milunovich, a technology analyst with Merrill Lynch & Co., at least 400 companies probably won't survive on their own merits. As a marketer for an early stage technology company, you are undoubtedly feeling the pressure to do more with less. So how can you contribute to the bottom line and help avoid becoming a "once hopeful" statistic? To begin with, your company should possess the critical raw materials for a successful company, such as a quality product or service which fills a market need, the right target audience and a strong executive team.

If your company is still working on putting those critical pieces together, first focus your efforts on the fundamentals and save this article for your future reference. This article assumes you have those critical pieces in place and are looking for practical ways to save some dough. While some of these tips may sound simple, I have found that little things often make a big difference.

I've attempted to cull tips from each of the marketing disciplines so that no matter what marketing "hat" you wear, you can immediately reap some cost-saving benefits. I hope you find these tips useful in your crusade to market technology in a downturn.

Marketing Challenge #1: You need a customer to win a customer.

For many, this catch-22 sounds painfully familiar. As a savvy marketer, you know how critical customer endorsements are to the credibility of your marketing efforts; that campaigns that leverage existing customers tend to yield the best results.

My suggestion for doing more with less: Barter with your prospects. Offer your product or services at a discount in exchange for the customer's participation in marketing activities. Remember, your prospects are facing the same economy as you are, and they are looking for cost-saving measures as well. Make sure to get the agreement in writing—and charge the cost of the product or service back to your customer should they fail to meet their marketing end of the bargain.

Marketing Challenge #2: You need to reach the press, but wire services are expensive.

Getting your story out to the press is an important piece of the marketing puzzle, and if you are a public company, newswire distribution is required. Using a news wire service is the best way to not only deliver your news directly to the desks of journalists, but also to get your news posted on the major portals and information sources such as Yahoo! and MSNBC. However, it does come at a price: on average, \$500 for a 400-word press release, depending on the wire service you choose. For most early stage companies, these costs can be prohibitive.

My suggestion: Think globally, act locally. Most early stage technology companies don't need to



distribute their press release nationally. Instead, distribute your release regionally and specify industries—an option that is free with most wire services. You will get the same results at a fraction of the cost. For example, if you are an early stage Bay Area technology company, choose the Northern California region and technology circuit. On average, you will save \$400 per release.

Marketing Challenge #3: You built your Web site, so where is everyone?

If the axiom “Build it and they will come” hasn’t rung true for your Web site, take heart. Driving the right audience to your site takes work. Of course, there are a plethora of methods for achieving your Web site traffic goals—from e-mail campaigns and advertising to public relations and trade shows. The only problem is the high costs associated with these marketing programs.

A better way: Optimize your Web site. Add meta tags to your Web site to help your company achieve top ranking in search engines. Meta tags are information inserted in the “head” area of your Web pages. These key words or descriptors are picked up by crawler-based search engines for free. Not only do they help you control your message, they help increase your reach. While I am not suggesting that you use meta tags exclusively to drive traffic to your Web site, it is certainly a cost-effective start. A word of caution: just optimizing your Web site with meta tags is not guaranteed and can take 90 days or more. To help accelerate the process, submit your company for search engines as noted in the next MTD tip.

Marketing Challenge #4: So you optimized your Web site, now what?

Optimizing your Web site with meta tags is important, but to increase your Web site traffic immediately, take advantage of freebies. To jumpstart the process, you can pay a nominal fee to submit your company to the major search engines. Costs range from an annual fee of \$30 to \$300. In addition, don’t forget to submit your company for free product or white paper postings offered by many publications and industry sites. For example, if you are an analytics company, DM Review (www.dmreview.com) or ITtoolbox (www.ittoolbox.com) are just a few examples of resources where you can post your information for free.

Marketing Challenge #5: You need PR, marketing communications, advertising and lead generation expertise, but can’t afford to hire multiple agencies or increase head count.

Despite the poor economy, the need for an integrated marketing program that leverages the multi-faceted nature of marketing still remains. With many marketing teams equivalent to a ‘one-man show’, many marketers face yet another quagmire: the need for the gamut of marketing expertise without the typical costs.

One benefit of the poor economy is that there is no shortage of available marketing talent. Working with marketing consultants can help get you through high activity periods, such as a product launch, without having to raise your head count. To get the most bang for your buck, look for marketing consultants with experience in multiple marketing disciplines who can wear a multitude of “hats” and ensure balance in your marketing efforts.

For more information, go to www.ventajacom.com.