

Marketing partnerships should build skills and knowledge, not just brochures

By Roger Sametz

The marketing-communications firm you work with is a key ally. But if your engagement is focused solely on the “making of things,” you’re not getting the value you need. Yes, you might have a great-looking brochure, but are others in your organization able to talk about what it’s saying?

Your relationship with a marketing-communications firm can generate value in different dimensions:

immediate	↔	long-term
tangible	↔	intangible
external	↔	internal
organizational	↔	departmental

Most relationships focus on the left side of the chart—creating a brochure, Web site, annual report, presentation—that is then broadcast (or narrowcast) into the world in order to sell a product or service, increase participation, or raise funds—near-term. And certainly many such projects are both necessary and successful.

But the value of these tactical projects, and the long-term health of your organization, can be greatly increased if attention is paid to the right side of the chart—if you and your marketing-communications partner also focus on these complementary values.

These right-side values are more about “thinking” and less about “things.” More about engaging your entire organization as a marketing engine and less about brochures. More about tapping into your colleagues’ desire to make things

Creating a more valuable partnership

Getting to a relationship with your marketing-communications firm that generates value beyond the creation of “things” usually requires a shift

Your time and dollars spent on marketing initiatives will go a lot further if you and your marketing partner focus on generating and promulgating the strategies and system thinking that inform tactical communications in addition to the creation of specific projects.

happen and to make a difference—but giving direction and shape to this energy. More about taking advantage of the investment you’ve most likely made in hardware and software. More about creating ambassadors.

in mind-set—both yours and your partner’s. You will need to balance emphasis on “deliverables” with thought about what has to happen across your organization so that more people have the knowledge, comfort, and tools to communicate more

effectively. Your partner may have to make a more profound shift: from thinking of him / herself as a vendor who gets paid to make discrete communications vehicles to that of a consultant who collaborates as part of a team to define, plan and facilitate communication strategies.

The effectiveness of all your print and electronic marketing efforts will be significantly enhanced if people who do not have “marketing” on their business cards understand your strategies and have the tools and training to make an in-brand presentation and have the messages and comfort to be good brand ambassadors.

In addition to understanding the constituents you need to engage, those constituents’ needs and expectations, what you want them to think and do, and the competitive landscape, you’ll need to collaborate with your marketing partner to:

+ **Evaluate your in-house resources**—hardware, software, skills, peoples’ fluency with your story.

+ **Craft a messaging structure** that is portable, one that not only informs the writing of different communication vehicles but also serves to build familiarity and comfort *internally*, so that informal conversations over a martini are in sync with more formal communications—your brochure and Web site.

+ **Develop and agree on an architecture** of communications. What needs to be communicated to whom, when, in what medium? When is outside marketing help necessary and what materials can be effectively (and cost-effectively) generated in-house with appropriate tools and training?

+ **Develop consistent approaches** to use of language, color, type, imagery, composition. A coherent visual and verbal voice, applied across media and projects, provides the glue to hold different communications together, building equity and creating more impact for fewer dollars. A “great” brochure that doesn’t share and reinforce messages, language, and design conventions with other print and electronic initiatives probably isn’t really so great.

+ **Transfer the thinking** generated above to those who commission, create, evaluate, and use communications—within and outside your organization. And build the understanding that every time the phone is answered, every time an email is sent, every conversation on a plane, is an opportunity to build and reinforce a relationship.

+ **Support this thinking** with appropriate tools and templates so that staff can create a data sheet on a rainy Sunday afternoon or build a convincing laptop presentation that doesn’t look like everyone else’s.

Generating returns in different dimensions

Does your marketing-communications firm then go away? Not at all. But many ongoing tasks can move in-house. The goal: you and your marketing-communications partner become a wider, seamless team. The data sheet you customize hours before a sales call and your e-mail newsletter are in perfect sync with the high-production-value brochure your partner has created. And, from the outside, no one can tell who made what. They’re all *your* communications.

Moving toward a relationship with your marketing-communications firm that combines tangible and intangible output, balances a transactional focus with a wider institutional view, and creates materials for outside constituencies alongside in-house tools and training could cost more in the near term.

But it’s an investment that will pay off in many ways. The organization as a whole will be more engaged in marketing. You’ll be able to respond to opportunities more quickly. Well-meaning rogue efforts to “make things” will be steered to an advantage; communications across initiatives and departments will reinforce each other; you’ll be able to tell your story more effectively—and you’ll wind up with a corps of ambassadors whose effectiveness will significantly amplify the impact of communications you “make.”

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About Sametz Blackstone Associates

Sametz Blackstone Associates is a brand-focused strategic communications practice that integrates strategy, message development, design, and technology to create compelling communication programs that help evolving organizations better navigate change.

Clients include academic and research institutions, life-science organizations, professional service firms, businesses, cultural organizations and other non-profits, and government agencies.

Founded in 1979, Sametz Blackstone has always approached communication and design as important tools to help organizations realize both their strategic and tactical goals.

The firm has years of experience helping organizations, both startups and centenarians, define and articulate their vision and value, and increase connection to key constituents. Sametz Blackstone helps clients build or re-energize brands, enter new markets or geographies, promote offerings, increase participation, generate earned and un-earned income, recruit and retain talent, and add value to the enterprise—over the short and long term.

Located in Boston's historic South End in a 150-year-old brownstone, Sametz Blackstone works with clients both around the corner and around the world.

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