

Is Your Marketing Tired and Run Down?

A Marketing CHECKUP May Be Just The Thing You Need.

BY NATALIE EVE TIMMONS

Marketing is a lot like the body. When it's healthy, we take it for granted. We enjoy the benefits of smoothly run marketing operations and a steady heart beat of profits.

When our marketing is tired and run down we develop aches and pain. And just like the body, we often can't pinpoint where the trouble is coming from.

A marketing audit is a diagnostic tool that will help you hone in on your problem areas. It's like a medical checkup. We review your past history, we ask a lot of pointed questions, we do some comparative analyses, and we make recommendations.

When Should You Consider a Marketing Audit?

There are basically five situations that warrant a marketing audit:

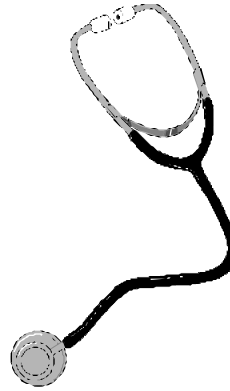
1. When you are unsure about what you need or want from marketing.
2. When your needs are complex and multifaceted.
3. When you're worried that your current marketing programs are headed in the wrong directions.
4. When you've lost a handle on whether or not your marketing programs are working.
5. When you're unsure about where you (and your marketing) should go from here.

Who Should do the Audit?

A marketing audit should be conducted by your senior marketing person (who isn't immersed in day-to-day marketing activities) or an outside marketing consultant. The benefit of using an outside marketing consultant is that they are more objective and less "married" to the programs and activities that are currently in place.

Also ask yourself these three questions: Does this person have the required auditing skills? Does this person have an in-depth understanding of marketing

strategy? Is this person affiliated with a professional association like the Public Relations Society of America? Does this person have the necessary resources (time, personnel) to conduct the audit?



What Can You Expect During a Marketing Audit?

First of all you should expect and require complete confidentiality from whomever you use to conduct your marketing audit. A way to ensure this is to work with a consultant who belongs to a professional trade association like the National Direct Marketing Association or the Public Relations Society of America.

Written Materials

From here a marketing audit follows a relatively predictable path. Your marketing auditor will ask you for samples of all your company's written materials. This includes:

- Brochures, newsletters, data sheets, direct mail, etc.
- Annual and quarterly reports
- Press kits, news releases, and news clippings
- Statements from top management regarding company goals, plans, mission & vision
- Marketing plans and reports
- Marketing budgets & financial reports
- Marketing reports to management, employees, members, etc.
- Job descriptions of any internal marketing personnel

Many of these items are highly confidential. A professional marketing consultant will protect your confidentiality and will return all of your materials when they complete the audit.

Next, your marketing auditor will need background information on your industry, material you've collected on your competition, and any primary or secondary research you've gathered on your industry, your customers, or your business.

Interviews

Once all the written materials and information have been reviewed and digested, your marketing auditor will want to interview several people in your organization. Personal interviews give the auditor greater insight into the nuances of your company and how your employees work together. A marketing auditor often interviews: the chief executive officer, the senior level marketing executive, the person who carries out the day-to-day administration of the marketing program; and other staff who may have a strong interest in the marketing function (i.e. sales, development director, fund-raising manager, chief financial officer, human resources, etc.)

The auditor may also interview your area media, customers, members, and legislators.

Reporting

Finally you can expect a written report. The report will generally include:

- A statement of your company's mission and vision.
- A situational or environmental analysis.
- A prioritized list of your target publics.
- Your company's current goals and objectives.
- Communications strategies.
- Positioning statement and key messages.
- Recommendations (tools and tactics).
- Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of your marketing activities.

Marketing audits may also include a time schedule, a budget, an outline of who should do what work, or a news clipping analysis. As you can see a marketing audit includes many of the elements you'd see in a marketing plan.

If your "marketing" has the blahs, consider conducting a marketing audit. It may just be the boost you need to build a stronger, healthier marketing program.

Warning: A marketing audit is not for the timid or weak. Follow as directed (just like a prescription, it's up to you to ignore or heed the advice that your doctor or marketing coach gives you).

Natalie Eve Timmons is the President of Communications Coach, Inc., a public relations, marketing, and graphic design firm. She has more than 18 years experience in the corporate, small business, and non-profit sector. For more information contact (603) 642-4949 or www.comcoach.net.