



## MARKETING

Wanda Kenton Smith

<< INSIGHT

# You can't grow without a passion for learning

**D**own deep I'm a marketing geek who loves to explore new and exciting approaches.

Not everyone shares my passion for learning, however. While some on my team dive head-first into the newest endeavor, others can barely mask their disdain at having to think about something bigger than the next deadline. But in the marketing game, learning is as essential as breathing. As an 11-year small business survivor, I know that if my crew and I don't stay ahead of the curve, we'll be crushed by a faster, smarter machine.

So what do we do to stay sharp?

Like many, we hold a monthly team meeting. But there's more to our meetings than the traditional donuts, pats on the back and departmental reports. We have those, too, but we've added two pretty cool components.

The first we borrowed from kindergarten. It's a version of the old show-and-tell concept, and everyone loves to play. Each team member is assigned to bring in a marketing, advertising or PR piece that broke through the media clutter and grabbed his or her attention.

We roll out the laptop and the big screen to study eye-catching Web sites or TV spots. We tear out magazine and newspaper ads and spotlight good PR placements. We collect brochures. We also bring in the dogs — the month's ugliest and dumbest PR/advertising efforts. As we debate the pros and cons of each, the discussion is lively and highly interactive. It is a fantastic real-time learning experience and also serves to motivate and unite us.

We conclude with a more in-depth training module. Each person is assigned one meeting a year in which to conduct the training. Any topic is acceptable, as long as it falls under the broad marketing or customer service umbrella. The individual selects the presentation format.

Recently, our office manager tackled a relatively controversial concept that has been bandied about of late and was the topic of a video interview on [www.adage.com](http://www.adage.com). She unearthed a fascinating read from *Fast Company* magazine — one of my favorites. The piece was written by founding editor Alan M. Webber and was based on an interview with Kevin Roberts, CEO of global advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi.

Roberts claims brands as we know them are history. He says the "combination of rising

global competition, proliferating product offerings, and multiplying Web sites" is diminishing a company's ability to establish its brand as a recognized mark.

In our media-saturated marketplace, it's harder than ever to establish a global brand unless you have the resources of a Nike. But, I disagree that brands as we know them are dead. You just have to work a whole lot smarter. And with a limited budget, you must laser in on your market and hit it hard and frequently with a compelling message.

Roberts' theory goes beyond brand extinction, however. He says a company's success lies in its ability to establish its products and services as "trustmarks" and ultimately, as "lovemarks." Those are marketing buzzwords

he coined and cashed in on with bestselling books.

Roberts says consumers not only must connect with a brand, but should be coaxed to fall in love with it.

In simple terms, the long-term successful brand equation requires an emotional trigger and connection among the targeted audience. I agree that it's not just recognition of a brand or a mark that matters, but how you perceive and feel about the brand that gives it legitimate sustaining power.

Roberts distinguishes between trademarks and trustmarks. A trademark, he explains, is nothing more than a copyright that protects a company. A trustmark, he argues, belongs to the people. His example: Richard Branson's Virgin Airways, that hip little airline with great fares that represents "the epitome of people power." Virgin clearly distinguishes itself against the large, impersonal and seemingly less-caring air carriers. As a result, it has transcended the standard brand and corporate identity and earned a consumer "trustmark."

Another dimension of trustmarks, Roberts says, is sensuality. He points to products that virtually beg to be touched: the original glass Coke bottle; a Montblanc pen; the first luxury Lexus; the iMac.

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Wanda Kenton Smith is a 24-year marine industry veteran who serves as president of Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations Inc., a full-service agency in Orlando, Fla., and Marine Marketing to Women Inc., an educational/training/seminar firm.

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vehicle that moved me that way.

But, his vision embodies a deeper connection — an actual love affair with a brand that supersedes mere recognition or respect.

Love affair? I mean, can you really love an intangible? To be honest, I have experienced that marketing phenomenon only once in my lifetime.

I will always remember my very first BMW and the sheer joy and exhilaration I felt each time I snuggled behind the wheel. I loved everything about that car. There's never been another

Is there a boat out there or other marine product that captures that post-brand trustmark with a sensual connection? Better yet, a lovemark? Think about it: Does anything come to mind?

Maybe you're catching on. This is precisely why I promote these exercises and invest in mind-think at our shop. As we take the time to ponder, to challenge ourselves, we expand our marketing horizons.

I hope I've given you something to think about.

[wanda@kentonsmithadu.com](mailto:wanda@kentonsmithadu.com)