

# Plan of attack

How to utilize an integrated marketing communications plan to get the right message to the right recipients

**T**he best marketing strategy in the world will fail if you are unable to get the right message to your potential customers at the right place and the right time.

“No matter how great your product or service, if your prospects don’t know it exists, there will never be a sale,” says Jonathan Ebenstein, the managing director of Skoda Minotti Marketing Services.

To ensure your marketing strategy is up to par, you should implement an integrated marketing communications plan.

*Smart Business* spoke to Ebenstein about integrated marketing communications plans and how they help deliver your message.

## What is an integrated marketing communications plan?

An integrated marketing communications plan takes all the various marketing touch points and ensures that they work together. For example, if your marketing communications plan calls for print advertising, the same theme of your print ads should be reflected on your Web site and other marketing materials. If customers get the same message and visual clues every time they come into contact with your company, they are much more likely to comprehend your marketing message. By doing this, you will build your brand awareness with those customers and stand a much better chance of having them remember you when they are ready to buy.

## What are touch points?

Touch points are all of the communicative interactions an individual will experience during his or her relationship with a company and its brand. The obvious ones are a company’s Web site, advertising and sales materials. But it’s the not-so-obvious that can really establish and build a company’s brand into a positive, or negative, experience or memory. Things like how you answer the phone, recruitment tactics, signage, e-mails, voice mails and, most importantly, how effective your people are at communicating and representing your company and brand.

## Why are multiple touch points necessary?

No one touch point or marketing tactic can be expected to effectively move the ROI need



**Jonathan Ebenstein**  
Managing director  
Skoda Minotti Marketing Services

le in and of itself. The key to a successful marketing plan is that it is integrated with other strategic marketing tactics all working in coordination with one another to communicate a single message. Think of it this way, if all you did was run one ad, one time, in one publication, what percentage of your target audience could you realistically expect to see it? A fairly low number, no doubt. However, if you combined your marketing efforts with additional tactics, (Web site, public relations, sales materials, direct mail, online marketing, trade shows, etc.) you stand a much better chance of not just reaching more people, but having the message be remembered when they are ready to make a purchase.

## What is the key to executing a successful integrated marketing plan?

The most important part of any marketing communication plan is identifying who your likely customers are. By better understanding your target market, your company will be better able to effectively communicate with the targeted customers both through selecting appropriate marketing channels and using positioning to meet customers’ psychological needs. Spending marketing dollars effectively increases the chance of mar-

keting success and eliminates waste. Ultimately, the proper strategically targeted and focused approach reduces the chance that inconsistent and misguided messages will be sent to customers, creating confusion that could adversely affect sales.

## Are there other things to consider when developing a marketing plan?

Absolutely. A well-thought-out marketing strategy must not only be focused on your customers, but it also needs to include an evaluation of competitors’ existing activities, likely responses and the appropriate actions to combat them. In the absence of a marketing strategy, marketing activities are often reduced to panicked responses to competitors’ activities that are not well-thought-out, often ineffective, and sometimes even damaging to the brand’s image.

## How do you budget and allocate resources?

Your integrated marketing communications plan must have a target budget and resources assigned to each element of the plan. Depending on the size of your budget, you will probably need to make trade-offs between methods to achieve your goals. In addition, you need to have the internal and external resources aligned to carry out the plan. Test what works and feed the information back into the plan. A good marketing communications plan can take your company to the next level.

## Is the development and execution of a marketing plan best handled in-house?

It depends on the depth of your in-house marketing capabilities, expertise and resources. However, companies who exclusively rely on in-house resources run the risk of creating an insular marketing strategy where campaigns are developed in a certain way because ‘that’s the way we do things here.’ A qualified agency can bring a fresh perspective — ideas for new strategies, new creative, new media, new offers — and real-world knowledge of what’s working for other companies in your space. <<

**JONATHAN EBENSTEIN** is the managing director of Skoda Minotti Marketing Services. Reach him at (440) 449-6800 or [jonathanebenstein@skodaminotti.com](mailto:jonathanebenstein@skodaminotti.com).

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