



Contact: Robert Bilotti
Principal, Novita
Ph: 773-590-3636
robert.bilotti@novitaunique.com
www.novitaunique.com

Word Count: 1900

Advertising Your Training: The Final Step

Having held the positions of Creative Director and Senior Writer at several Metro Manhattan advertising agencies before I entered the training field, I am amazed at the “if we build it, they will come” attitude that is prevalent in the training field.

Many training departments are under the false impression that employees are always eager to take their training or even know why they must.

What’s worse, they spend tens of thousands of dollars building fabulous and effective training programs, only to spend the measly price of paper to print out notices that their administrative assistant produced to promote the program.

The training development process should not end when the product is complete. The final step is creating a campaign to advertise the program internally to employees.

This is where training developers and managers could learn a few lessons from the advertising industry in order to get employees and employers excited about training.

Information Overload

To begin with, you must swallow your pride and put away the misconception that people want to learn. I know this sounds extreme and unrealistic (and it is), but think of it as your motivation for creating an effective internal advertising campaign. Advertisers do.

They know what they're up against. Everyone hates those pesky advertisements during their favorite show or in their magazine (many do actually enjoy them but you see where I am going with this). Still, advertising is a necessity in the eyes of the companies who pay for it. Why? Because with the exception of gasoline and maybe Viagra[®], no one is busting down the store door to purchase a particular product.

It's the same situation you face. Sure, you've got a great training program from which everyone will benefit immensely, but the employees in your company are bombarded with internal information in the form of announcements, meetings, company newsletters, intranets, gossip and even other training. Why should they pay attention to your training? Or, if it's mandatory training, why should they be motivated about participating?

Thus, the challenge is to grab people's attention and tell them why. But how? The same way advertisers do it: by creating an advertising plan.

Create an advertising plan

Don't short-change your training. You've worked hard and it's a good program that will benefit the employees and the bottom line. By creating an internal advertising plan, you are giving it the due respect and attention it deserves.

What should be included in your plan? Well, we don't have to get as detailed and intricate as advertisers do. The basics can be covered by answering the following three questions:

1. Who is my audience?
2. What media do I use?
3. What is the concept?

Who is my audience?

This question should really read: what is my audience like? We're not only looking for a job title when we want to know our audience but also what are their personality traits that may help you in reaching out to them.

For instance, if your audience is made up of telemarketers, your campaign may differ than if it was a group of financial analysts because what appeals to one group may not the other. I know that we are constantly told in corporate America that everyone should be treated the same. But if you truly want to reach someone, you need to play into their personality. It may sound inappropriate to think this way, but in this case it is somewhat alright to stereotype. It's common practice in advertising.

Think about advertisements you have seen. Does every guy love football and every women shopping? Of course not. But the advertisers have done enough research to understand the generalities that will help them tap into their audience's emotional state. It's the same inside a company. There are hundreds of personalities among your employees but also commonalities. Try targeting those as you create your campaign.

A majority of the time, the identified audience in your internal advertising campaign is the same people who will actually be taking the training. This is not always true, however, especially if a

manager needs to recommend or approve an employee's training. Then the audience is different and may require a different approach.

Ever wonder why tire companies advertise using babies and mostly women in their ads when cars are supposed to be a "guy" thing? Because research shows that it's the woman taking the car to the shop and making the tire purchasing decision. So think about who actually makes the training decision and market your advertising to them.

What is my media?

Many of the media that are available to consumer advertisers are also available in some form or another internally within your organization.

Advertisers can use television, you can use closed circuit t.v. or video. They have the internet, you have your intranet. They create print ads for newspapers and magazines, you can do the same in your company newsletters and magazines. You may not have billboards but you do have posters and flyers. You also have direct mail to send and let's not forget email.

So how do you decide which to use? Think about your audience. They will be the determining factor. Novita once developed a classroom-based program for mechanics of an airline who were not computer savvy or simply did not have access to a computer. Sending them an email or posting something on the intranet would have been a waste of time. Instead, we put up a poster in their locker rooms and cafeteria. On the other hand, when we developed a cd-rom based training course for investment consultants, the intranet was a perfect media choice as was the company newsletter and flyers in the company gym.

What is the concept?

The concept is the theme of your advertising. It's what's going to get people excited about the training. It may be an attention-grabbing headline, a unique photograph or a funny video.

Whatever it is, it has to be more than just information about the training. Sure, people need to know where it will be held and how to sign up, but the concept is what's going to stop them in their tracks and let them know that your training is good and beneficial and will help them do their job more efficiently and maybe even lead a better life.

Sound important? Absolutely. The importance of a good concept is immeasurable. Sound difficult? You bet it is. Coming up with a concept that accomplishes the aforementioned is not easy. If it were, there would be many writers and artists starving on Madison Avenue.

Why is it so hard? Well, remember our earlier realization: people have enough information to absorb and they don't need anymore. It's up to you to convince them they not only need it but want it. It's quite a challenge but not impossible and some people, including myself, find it fun and rewarding.

For those of you who don't have much experience developing an advertising concept, start with what you know. You might not have created advertising before, but I'll bet you have an opinion on which advertisements you like and don't like.

Think about those and why you think they work or don't work. Was it the humor or did it shock you? Did you find the people in the advertisement appealing or is it what they said that got you thinking? Try to emulate those that affected you in your own campaign. (Be careful not to directly steal an idea or a trademarked tagline or image. Advertisers are extremely protective of them. They are their intellectual capital. Trust me, the national milk board will come after you and your "Got Training?" campaign.)

Next, hold brainstorming sessions with your peers and shoot off ideas to each other.

Remember to accept any idea and consider it from every angle.

There is a plethora of information on creating advertising concepts at your local book store or library or on the internet (start with www.adage.com). There you can learn the principles of good advertising, such as “Sell the sizzle, not the steak.” This is probably the oldest advertising adage around, yet for the novice, it is an important one to grasp.

It means sell the benefit of a product, not the product itself. People are tempted by the sizzle of a steak not the piece of meat. In your case, you have to sell the “benefit” of training, not the training itself. Not just any benefit will do, however. You must dig deep and get to the true benefit.

The true benefit

Remember Static Guard®? Static Guard eliminated static cling by spraying the product right on your clothes. The ads for the product, however, went one step further. According to them, not only were you saved from static cling, but more importantly, the embarrassment of walking down the office hallways with your dress clinging to your pantyhose. That was the true benefit.

An easy way to discover the true benefit is through what I like to call the “So what?” technique. It’s easy. All you need is two people. One to describe the benefit of the training and the other to say “So what?” For example, if one of you says, “This training will help our customer service representatives quickly discern if they can handle a call themselves or if it needs to be routed to a different department.” The other says, “So what?” and forces you to keep digging.

You might then respond, “That means they won’t waste time on the phone with a customer they can’t really even help.” And the other says, “So what?”

“That means they can handle more calls per hour.” “So what?”

“That means better performance and a better compensation review.”

A-ha! Now we’re talking... compensation. We now know the true benefit and can build our internal advertising around this idea.

Novita used the “So what?” technique when we created a training program for district managers of a retail chain that taught them how to properly use the company’s intranet to efficiently download daily financial reports. We advertised the training by selling them on the idea of spending more time with their family and friends. You might say, “What do family and friends have to do with financial reports?” Well, the managers were spending so much time fumbling around the intranet trying to download these reports, that they were wasting company time. “So what?” So, they were staying later at night and accessing the intranet from home on the weekends instead of eating dinner with their spouses and playing ball with their kids. We got down to the true benefit and targeted their emotional state.

First impressions last

One final note. When creating an internal advertising campaign, remember to be professional. Many times this is the first impression your employees will have of the training (and your department!) and sometimes the only impression your employers will have.

Take the time to develop an internal advertising program that is appropriate and effective. If you need to, hire an outside firm. Novita is unique in that we offer both training development and/or internal advertising, but there are many firms that solely develop advertising, including internal advertising (start with www.aaaa.org for a list). The cost-benefit will pay off in the long run because your classrooms will be filled with energetic, enthusiastic participants and your overall

training initiative will be more successful. It's like that mysterious saying, "If you advertise it, they will come."