



It's near the end of a project when someone invariably exclaims, "But wait, we didn't say anything about this!" One of the most pervasive hazards I've come across in my role as a marketing strategist is "message creep." There may be marvelous attributes and functions of the specific product or service being presented, but does the end-user really care? What is most significant and relevant in the here and now? And, more importantly, what will address your customers' greatest challenges?

It's essential to target your message using language that is familiar to a specific audience and is compelling in its presentation. Maintain your focus. Short and simple has the greatest appeal. Of course, additional ideas aren't bad in isolation, but test them to make sure they belong in "this"

brochure, e-mail or video. Avoid sharing so much about everything that your message doesn't address any one thing. Let the focal point be the primary message, and don't get lost in the weeds describing every detail.

Keep it Simple

Remember that your marketing tool was not designed to teach the end-user all about your product. It should introduce the product in a compelling way and provide a hook for the recipient to agree to learn more by clicking for additional information, asking for a brochure or setting a rep appointment. Carefully limit the intent of every piece that conveys information, whether it's a brochure, sell sheet, introductory video or interactive walkthrough. Use the right

Saying More with Less



Focus on customer benefit to reach your target audience

By Keith Flint

tool for the right job. This speaks to the value of the multi-faceted campaign. Doesn't someone need to hear a message several times before it leaves a lasting impression? Identify multiple touch points to reach your audience. Rather than including all these points in one piece, deliver the message by orchestrating multiple opportunities, each supporting the product or service. And establish a thread that sews these isolated thoughts together for message continuity that leads to the most durable and favorable impression.

Sell the Solution

It's a common pitfall to assume that your audience is truly enamored with your product. In most cases, they aren't. Especially in a tech-driven industry, it's easy for those on the

inside to get excited about how the technology was applied to the solution. Don't assume that the subtle nuances that excite you are equally compelling to your audience. Your dominant message must illustrate that your novel product or service provides a solution that can help customers do their job better or more easily. Trim the superfluous. Keep it simple. Keep it clear.

Your message must give far more weight to the end-user value versus the specifics of the mechanism. The audience member needs to see himself reaping the benefits of the offering. This is as true in B-to-B as it is in retail. The idea that "this looks good on me" equals "this will make me look good and help me perform my work more capably."

The value proposition isn't about the engineering

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functionality of the product, it's about the creative solution to a problem. Identify the customer's pain point and introduce your solution. Frame it as THE answer. And tell him why in a manner that establishes value to him, not you. When you focus on the customer benefit, you will successfully reach your target audience.

Let's think of it this way: I'm an ultra-marathon runner who embraces the minimalist shoe movement, so this resonates with me. When New Balance began promoting their Minimus running shoes they didn't talk about how much less material they were using compared to other models or the design process they used to scale back the mass of the shoe. They set about describing how it would work for the runner—and the benefits that runner could enjoy: improved form, more natural motion, closer feel for the running surface. And it sold. I've worn more than seven pairs myself in the last 12 months alone. And I'm skeptical and naturally hard to suit.

Devil in the Details

As I learned during my experiences with both large pharmaceutical and small biotech firms, addressing your audience in general terms is especially difficult when you're dealing with a complex, highly technical product.

For example, a product manager may be charged with the responsibility of creating a brochure that a pharmaceutical sales rep or biotech clinical specialist will be taking to physicians to detail the clinical utility of the company's drug. While the mechanism of action of the drug is important and clinically differentiates a newly discovered molecule or novel gene therapy from its competitors, it is a double-edged sword when trying to communicate effectively. What does the clinician really need to know? It's probably not the minutia of the mechanism, but rather "how do I use it clinically?," "how is it different?" and "how does it enhance my ability to care for my patients?" It's difficult to balance the client's enthusiasm for the technical with the intricacy of detail that will cause the clinician to flatline.

The detail dilemma also translates to the IT world. Today, more promotional efforts are being delivered digitally.

- It's essential to target your message using language that is familiar to a specific audience and is compelling in its presentation.
- When you focus on the customer benefit, you will successfully reach your target audience.
- A carefully crafted message with an overarching theme and message is essential in all marketing and educational communication.

The resulting reliance on interactive pieces, graphic animation and live-action videos also fosters a tendency toward integrating oppressive detail. Although the solution is highly technical, an engineer is probably much more enchanted with the detailed specifics of the product than the viewer. The larger story (how the features are linked to end-user benefit) is lost when the video is overloaded with detail.

Remember to keep the message compelling. If you lose the audience during video viewing, you've squandered a critical opportunity. It's a mistake to ask for collaborative review late in the process. If a product manager needs to weigh in, make sure it's at the scripting phase of the video project.

Delivery Tools

Print: Organize your message around an overarching point from your headline and sub-head. Bullets or paragraph headings break your communication into smaller segments, but each segment must be supportive of your overall thought, not diverting attention from it. At the conclusion of your communication, your audience should be able to identify the primary point. If not, you've fallen short.

E-mail: Use compelling subject lines to increase open rates. Be specific and brief. Ideally, message lines should be less than five words in length ... three, if you can swing it. Remove articles such as "a," "an" and "the" from your subject line and if possible, make the subject line a call to action in itself.

Video: Because I do a great deal of video production and scriptwriting, I feel very strongly that if you can't convey your message in two-and-a-half to three minutes,



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you're not going to be successful. Pop-song rules apply to product promotion: Set the hook and leave them asking for more, not waiting for it to end. There is a reason why many television commercials are only 30 seconds long, and why some radio spots last only 15 seconds.

Customers have a very short attention span. During that limited opportunity, you must distinguish your product from the competition, extol your product's virtues and, most importantly, tell the viewers how this product will revolutionize the way they do their work. Your video is not a brochure on wheels. One of our clients chose very well with a recent project, allowing the graphics and imagery in a virtual tour to do the heavy lifting. We minimized the copy and let the visuals tell the story.

Repurposing content: It's my point of view that a carefully crafted message with an overarching theme and message is essential in all marketing and educational communication. Begin with a message platform that identifies a strategic, pointed story. Support this platform with message derivatives that roll into the story and create an ownable value proposition. Individual messages can then

be tailored to various communication tools, whether they be a tweet or an HTML e-mail. No matter which tactic you use, evaluate your message carefully. Make sure it ties back to the message platform and supports the strategy.

Discipline

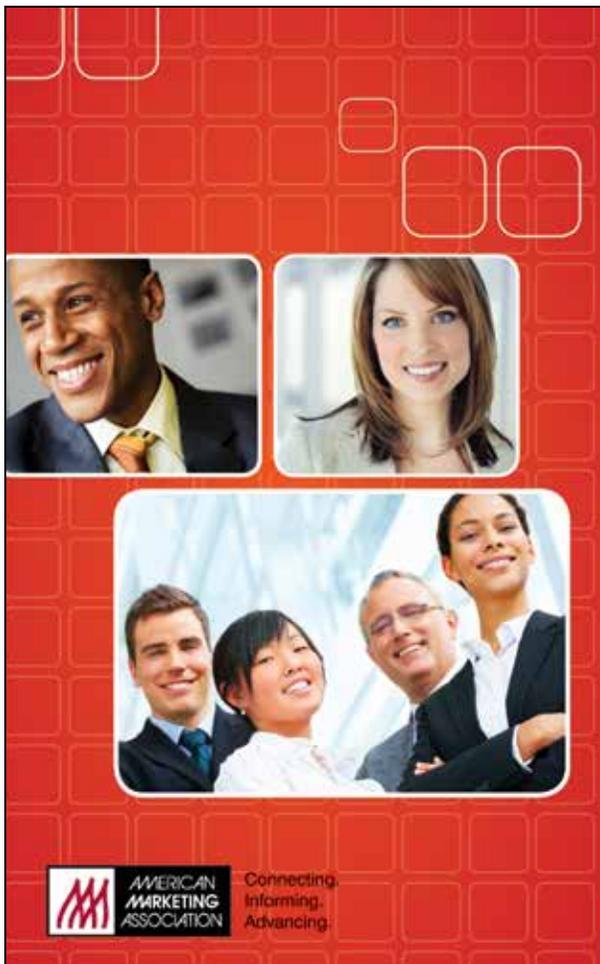
In closing, no marketing message is ready for delivery until you apply disciplined, critical thinking to evaluate it:

- Did you use a singular idea?
- Are your descriptions as concise as possible?
- Is your terminology clear?
- Did you keep the focus on the end-user?
- Did you keep it solutions-oriented?
- Could the audience identify the overarching message?
- Would it compel the audience to learn more?

If so, you're ready to take your project to "final."

"But wait, we didn't say anything about this!" **MM**

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The advertisement features a red background with a white grid pattern. At the top, there are several white-outlined squares of varying sizes. Below this, there are three photographs: a man in a suit and tie, a woman in a business suit, and a group of four diverse professionals in business attire. At the bottom left is the American Marketing Association logo, which consists of the letters 'AMA' in a stylized font next to the text 'AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION'. To the right of the logo is the tagline 'Connecting. Informing. Advancing.'

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