

Making It Easier for Customers to Understand You

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Excerpt

In the competitive hi-tech industry, product benefits and a company's position may not be evidently clear, or immediately distinctive. New players usually find it frustrating to make a dent, especially when they have tried all forms of marketing. Let us explore how, by using an integrated marketing communication (IMC) approach, technology firms can effectively get core product or company messages across an otherwise noisy market.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is not a new marketing concept. With IMC, the marketing message across all channels and media are kept consistent. You may be familiar with or have even used some of these avenues. They include Public Relations, direct marketing, general advertising, your website, your email and even personal selling. These days, IMC is likely to include interactive campaigns, where special websites and events are created for customers to have a personalized experience of the company or the product.

One favourite IMC campaign that comes to mind was from Hewlett-Packard. It was their "(Company) + HP = Everything is possible" campaign. For instance, they featured the partnership between **Dreamworks+HP**, and **ANA+HP**. The same single message was shown around the world, whether online, in print or in television advertisement. It appealed to the world's audience by drawing on examples which is familiar to the home audience. For Singapore, it was the institutional **National Library Board (NLB) + HP** interpretation. Although executed differently around the world, it delivered the single message of how HP helped companies with its enterprise solutions, shifting the focus away from its usual printer and PC offerings.

What if you choose to ignore IMC?

If you're reading about IMC for the first time, you may think that only tech MNCs like HP can orchestrate it. In reality, IMC can be deployed by any company. It is just not commonly used by local infocomm enterprises (iLEs), who would rather run promotion-related marketing activities. Customers who have little contact with the company only experience one aspect of the company. If distributors are involved,

each may promote a slightly different proposition. Your customers can get confused or worse – choose to ignore future messages from your company. Hence it is important that you stick to an IMC strategy each time you communicate about your products or company.

What can IMC improve?

Let's take a look at how your company can benefit from an IMC discipline. In the crowded hi-tech industry, the benefits of most offerings can be intangible, and differences from the competition may not be immediately evident. For both consumer and business products, you need to make your brand name part of the consideration criteria of your potential client. However, if you are a small or new to the market, how do you make sure your name sticks? There is the need to associate the brand with strong technical differences and characteristics. Or if you are promoting a consumer product, you can even try to involve some emotive benefits. It is only through constant execution, and consistent messaging that your marketing efforts can start to help consumers connect with your product strengths, and to your brand name.

How can you get started?

We find that the 2 main reasons why companies hesitate to use IMC are the cost consideration, and the lack of resources. You can actually deploy an IMC campaign within your marketing budgets. The key focus in an IMC plan is the consistency of the message. This is something you, as the decision-maker, can directly control or prioritise.

To get started, decide on the single message that will serve to attract your target audience. Do your research and study how competitors are positioning their products. If you want the

campaign to be effective over a longer period, say 6 months, you have to find a message that will stay current. This explains why a promotional pitch with a limited time offer is not a desirable message to use. Remember, the foundation message that you choose will form the first impression on customers. Their subsequent perception of your company will build on this. Next, craft the message to have a similar look and feel, on all the media you can use. Using the same colour, graphics, fonts and tone of message can help portray a distinctive message.

When you have decided on your message, have a look at your budget to calculate the number of channels you can make use of. Also draw out a clear calendar of activities to rationalise the timing of each tactical execution.

The following tactics may help:

- Issue a press release to magazines and trade publications (including those

online) which your target audience reads.

- Send an email to your present list of clients.
- Have an announcement on the welcome page of your website. Remember to keep it updated.
- Inform your channel distributors and engage them to communicate the same message to customers.
- Coincide IMC launch with any trade event where you are likely to receive press coverage, especially if your solution is unique.

At the end of the day, you want to get out a singular message consistently. It's as simple as that. Start small if your budget doesn't allow for the use of many channels but ensure that you deliver the same message in line with your corporate brand to as many channels as you can.

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