



5 Ways You Can Beat The Big Guys At Marketing

You may not have their resources, but you've got something large companies don't have. Try using these small-business tactics to get an edge in marketing.

It's time we faced facts: You and I are never going to compete with the Big Boys. You know, the major players in your industry. They're armed with scary things like reams of data and large marketing budgets. There's just no way we'll keep up with their endless barrage of advertising or their smarty-pants ad execs. We're doomed.

Take heart, small-business owner! It turns out you're not doomed—far from it. Because, as you'll see, being small comes with its own advantages.

Why Small Trumps Big

Some of the biggest companies are realizing these advantages as well. In fact, some of them are finding ways to go small when it comes to marketing. For example, during the last Super Bowl, OREO managed to take over the coveted mindshare of the game watchers without buying another Super Bowl commercial. When the power went out in the Superdome during the third quarter, OREO's small marketing team—just 16 people (that's small for a giant company)—was able to create a Twitter ad in just a few short minutes.

The ad went viral. Instead of running another \$4 million ad in the second half, OREO sent a tweet that caught like wildfire—and outperformed every other \$4 million commercial. Small, nimble, quick.

So let's look at the facts again. The brand leaders in your market probably have lots of resources, which is something most small-business owners don't have. Yet an abundance of resources doesn't always equate success. Why not try some of these small-guy tactics to beat the big guns in marketing?

1. Scope. Because the big players in your industry may have to burn through their resources (gotta beat next year's budget!), they often cut a wide swath when it comes to their marketing efforts. In many cases, there's no demographic of people they won't try to cater to, no ad platform they won't try to master. They're everywhere and in everything: Facebook, Twitter, the papers, TV, you name it.

But you, small-business owner, are disciplined. Figure out exactly who your customer demographic is, and focus on them only. Know them inside and out, and specifically go where they are to reach out. Oh, and don't mess around with tons of different ad platforms: Just stick with the few that work best.

2. Timing. Red tape. Committees. Boards. These are the types of things that slow a marketing team to a grinding halt, because in this day and age, many large companies often can't run an ad that hasn't been approved by the legal department, the subcommittee, the marketing director, the boss, his boss and finally the family patriarch whose name is on the side of the building (who should have no business reading ad copy).

You, on the other hand, have it easy. You are deft and nimble, and you can run circles around big companies' ad departments because, well, your "marketing team" is most likely just you. So take advantage of it! Find something timely like OREO did within your industry and capitalize on it.

3. Ad spends. The big guys often blanket ad buys, looking for eyeballs, not conversions.

Beat them at their own game: Choose one ad platform (Facebook, Twitter, Google AdSense, etc.), focus your energy on that platform and dominate. You can't beat them everywhere, but you can probably beat them on one platform.

Or better yet, create something incredible that gets people talking about your product for you, which leads us to ...

4. Smarts. Most big company marketing departments are run by teams—teams comprised of people who could have different agendas and different ideas. Although some teams thrive in this type of atmosphere, it can be hard for most. "Finding common ground" within your team can often just mean having the boss pick something. And that's not ideal.

You're smart and capable. You know everything about your company, who your target market is and how to reach them because you've most likely had to do it all yourself. So take advantage of this fact and own the competition. Create something that you don't have to pay people to talk about. A resource, a compelling ad, a story ... the possibilities are endless.

The best form of marketing has always been word of mouth or the kind that you can't manufacture directly. Create something that gets people talking.

5. "Edginess." This is the X Factor. Big companies can often be slow and boring. That's not necessarily a bad thing in many industries, but it does mean there's a lot of room for improvement in bland industries. Even if they were given the green light to be edgy, many corporations may not even know how.

Ride in the front; start leading. Become a thought leader in your industry, and speak your mind (Mark Cuban is an excellent example). You might upset a few people, but you'll never make everybody happy anyway. Just know who you're ultimately trying to reach, and it will reap benefits. Take some small risks with your marketing message, and expand on what works.