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Making the most of guerrilla marketing

CRN's reseller voice, **Mathew Dickerson**, shares some insights gleaned from careful observation of election candidates

As you read this, the local government elections in NSW will have just been completed for another four years. The winners will be the ones who achieved the correct equation of maximum message to correct demographic for minimum cost. While this may seem like a slightly irrelevant point for a reseller column, it is particularly relevant from a marketing perspective.

Local government can be the ultimate exercise in guerrilla marketing. There were 148 local government areas holding elections with thousands of candidates. Most of those candidates were independents who believed they could make a difference, but only had a limited budget to work with. Sounds a bit like resellers. There were also some major parties that had some major budgets to spend on advertising. The independents believed they could do a better job – a bit like large multinationals in the IT industry who have budgets far exceeding small resellers. As resellers, we believe we can deliver a better service with better outcomes.

I have learnt a lot from the candidates in our local election by way of innovative ways that candidates have tried to get their message out there. Many of these are applicable to our businesses.

Most candidates have realised that the days of simply running a basic ad in the local newspaper are long gone. It becomes too expensive to gain penetration as people absorb their news in so many different ways now.

I have seen a huge variety of approaches from the candidates in the Dubbo area. There were 42 candidates and there were seemingly 42 different approaches to sending the message to the masses. We had one candidate build a structure to put in the back of his ute and pay a teenager to drive the streets of Dubbo for a very cheap hourly rate. We have had self-confessed luddites from the older

generation use Facebook and websites to try and attract voters with a mini email and SMS spam campaign thrown in for good measure. We have more cars covered in advertising stickers than at a round of the V8 Supercars. Traditional newspaper, radio and TV has still been used sparingly, proving there is still some room for traditional media.

We have had direct mail, mailbox drops, 'junk mail' drops and candidates walking the beat handing out brochures to all and sundry. They were usually wearing printed T-shirts, hats and badges while they walked the beat. Added to this were A-frames, banners, corflutes and media releases.

A huge range of advertising methods and a range of successes. And remember that through this entire process the product cannot really be changed and is different in each case. Each 'product' is unique and the crucial aspect is to try and determine your point of difference and market that to the correct demographic, as cheaply as possible.

It might be argued that being a candidate might be similar to being Microsoft. Many people have joked that Microsoft is not a software company but a marketing company. And Microsoft doesn't do a lot of traditional advertising.

So what can we learn from this election example?

The first important message is to know your product. Work out your points of difference. Why will you beat the competition? What makes you unique? Before you start doing any marketing think about what you are actually marketing. Once you have worked out that then work out the demographic that will be most attracted to your unique selling proposition. Then, how do you best appeal to that demographic? Once you have lined up those ducks, make sure all of your marketing activities focus on the outcomes you want to achieve.

To do this you need to be very clear

“ The first important message is to know your product ”

with your own core business.

It reminds me of a very old business tale. There used to be a company called Pail Worth that made the best wooden pails in the world. People used to travel from all over the world to buy them. Then, some idiot invented plastic and manufacturers started making plastic buckets that were cheaper and more reliable. Pail Worth tried to combat this by making stronger and more reliable wooden pails and selling them cheaper. Doing this eventually sent them broke. Pail Worth lost focus on what they were. The company thought it was a manufacturer of water-carrying devices. It wasn't – it was a company of timber craftsmen. They happened to build wooden pails as a result of being timber craftsmen, but building buckets was not their core focus. They needed to realise that the market no longer needed wooden pails, but they still needed quality timber products.

And so it is the same with resellers. One major vendor recently announced it was bundling its notebooks with an online backup facility. The first reaction for many resellers was one of concern. Surely this would rob resellers of sales of a range of backup products and limit our ability to make money? Going back to the bucket story, we need to be certain of what our business is and what it is achieving. I see the bundling of backup services as a way of providing the types of services that clients need – and possibly earning some commissions along the way. Most important it is giving the clients what they want. If we don't provide the services that our clients want then someone else will. Nothing is surer. We can play the ostrich game and keep selling obsolete products or we can move with the times and deliver what our clients want.

Let me know what clever guerrilla marketing ideas you have to market your business at mathew.dickerson@smallbusinessrules.com