


Service Insight

Integrated marketing communication

What can we learn from flying geese?

By Tina Hahn, Vice President - Axon



Tina Hahn
Vice President

Migrating geese have got it right! When they gather to head for warmer climates their subconscious strategy is based on integrated teamwork. As each goose flaps its wings, it creates “uplift” for the birds that follow. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone. The lesson to be learned here is that if each piece of the communications mix share a common direction, consistent story and strive for synergy then each element of the marketing mix can provide “uplift” for the others, resulting in a greater return on the overall investment.

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been a buzz word for years, though academics still struggle to agree on the definition. While waiting for them to decide it could be described essentially as “a cross functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven purposeful dialogue with them”¹. Hence that’s what every sensible marketer should do. Now, that might be easier said than done.

So how can one do this successfully? A good answer was given by an Australian marketing research group after they had reviewed numerous marketing programmes and their related performance outcomes². Their findings were clear and compelling:

Market-based assets and financial expectation

Integrated marketing communications should be linked to financial indicators of performance such as sales, market share, profit and return on investment.

- *Does this sound like familiar demands from your organisation?*

Customer and stakeholder connectivity

Integrated communications requires an outside-in approach where understanding of customers as well as other key stakeholders should be put first.

- *Do eagerness to get going and current beliefs sometimes prevail in everyday routine instead of fresh and fact-based customer insights?*

Strategic consistency

Integrated marketing communications should coordinate the sending of a consistent story through all marketing mix elements.

- *Do all your communications around clinical trials, publications, online and print materials, symposia, educational programmes, congress activities, key opinion leader programmes, branding, public relations and social media activities live up to this?*

Cross functional integration

In order to portray a consistent image to the outside an organisation should also be integrated from the inside.

- *Most teams would like to see themselves living up to this, but sometimes it can be a struggle keeping it all together?*

“Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been a buzz word for years, though academics still struggle to agree on the definition.”

Resource commitment for IMC

For an effective IMC effort there must be adequate resources in terms of money, time and a qualified workforce.

- *Are shortages in any of these areas ever a challenge?*

On top of this comes the “on-demand” trend where customers (healthcare professionals and consumers) can now seek out, access, filter and store information at a time and place relevant to their own lifestyle and situation “On demand” is today also accompanied by the ability and expectation of staging experiences, a further level of business besides the basics of making products and delivering services. Staging experiences is the level that consumer brands like Disney, Levis, Apple and Starbucks strive for. Starbucks do not just provide the service of brewing coffee and handing it over counter, they offer an experience. This can be done in the pharmaceutical arena as well with customer programmes that surpass the expected service offering.

Essentially integrated marketing communications is a strong communication programme which starts with a simple and compelling story. It is the consistent and complementary telling of that story through the right mix of communication vehicles that will, ultimately, deliver the successful uptake of the messages, and in turn, the brand through memorable experiences.

It can be bit of a hurdle to encompass and live up to all this in today’s hectic business life with the constant threat of economic declines and resulting price pressures and it requires a strong internal commitment at all levels. Fortunately the logical payoff for going the IMC way is a better return of investment (ROI).

However, partnering with a mix of agencies that complement each other in the various disciplines needed for excellent integrated marketing communication can be an efficient way to reach the ultimate business goal whether it be market access, fast market uptake or retaining and converting customers. Effective client-agency and agency-agency relationships will give you an extra set of hands in the journey towards your goal. Chose agencies that match the values of your company and also complement your in-house expertise and experience to complete your “V” formation.

Let’s see if we can work efficiently together and do better than the flock of geese!

Tina Hahn is Vice President of Axon and can be contacted at tahn@axon-com.com

¹ Duncan, T R (2002). IMC: Using Advertising and Promotion to Build Brands, New York: McGraw-Hill

² Reid et al. (2005). The relation between integrated marketing communication, market orientation, and brand orientation. Journal of advertising, vol. 34, no 4

