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Commentary & Analysis

Print Service Providers: Making the Connection

By Barb Pellow on November 19, 2009

In today's economy, print service providers face the same challenges as any other marketers. They must be creative and challenge themselves to push beyond the boundaries of their minds—they must think outside the box for innovative ways of reaching customers and prospects. This requires an effective communications strategy that builds awareness while educating prospects and clients about the capabilities you offer.

In November, I interviewed three print service providers that shared innovative techniques for going beyond simply providing a customer with a Web site link or sales brochure. In a difficult economy, these firms realized that the bottom line of good marketing is getting connected with customers. The purpose of each interaction wasn't necessarily to sell something, but to build awareness and mindshare. Ultimately, when the customer or prospect needed support, that print service provider would be at the top of their minds.

Ideal Printers, INC.: Making an Impression

Ideal was founded in 1986 by Larry Vaughn. Since that time, the company has grown to become the fifth largest printer in Houston, Texas. According to Vaughn, "Our constant focus is on customer satisfaction. We are continuously expanding the services we offer to our customers to leverage new technologies and meet their needs."

Ideal has traditional offset, digital color, and large format capabilities. It offers full variable data, Web-to-print, and short run digital printing. Its eight-color 40" perfecter press is great for large run bulk printing jobs such as catalogs, brochures, and postcards. Ideal's large format operation provides clients with signage, vehicle wraps, wall murals, and laminating and mounting services.

Ideal is leveraging technology to support its business. The company implemented a series of six informational e-mails that were created to highlight its services. The final e-mail directed recipients to a personalized URL, where recipients could identify the services of greatest interest to them.

Figure 1: Ideal Images with pURLs



Larry Vaughn stated, "We want the Ideal name on everything that we do. Our Web site, brochures, e-newsletters, delivery vehicles, promotional give-aways, and every e-mail signature will display the Ideal logo. Service providers also need to remember that every customer touchpoint is an opportunity to build brand and awareness. We don't waste an inch of usable space on an invoice, delivery ticket, quote, or re-order reminder. These are all opportunities to build our brand."

Vaughn continued, "The traditional cold call is dead. In most office complexes, a sales rep can't get through the security screening without an appointment. Getting the appointment requires good, solid networking. My recommendation is to join associations and groups that are relevant to the clients that you want to serve. Ideal is a member of the AMA [American Marketing Association], HPMMA [Houston Production Managers Association], NAPL [National Association for Printing Leadership], Cy-Fair Chamber of Commerce, and DSCOOP [Digital Solutions Cooperative]. I am also actively engaged in groups aligned with my outside interests, including the Coastal Conservation Association and Ducks Unlimited. All these groups are valuable organizations for building out a network for Ideal."

Ideal recently set up a Twitter account that has 100 followers. In addition, the company's sales reps are all using LinkedIn. Vaughn's perspective is that you can't sit around waiting for the phone to ring. You have to get out there and promote your business via every marketing channel possible.

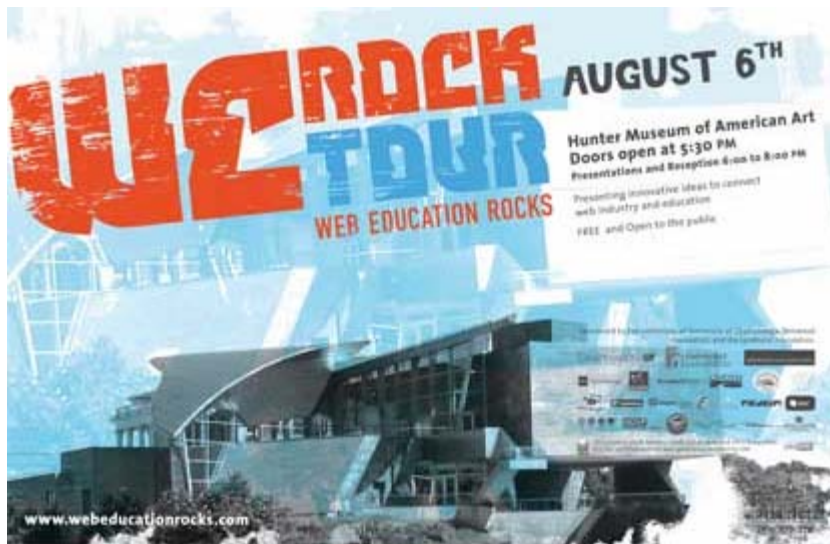
Williams Visual Solutions

Williams Visual Solutions is an evolving marketing service provider located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The company currently serves customers throughout the Southeastern and Eastern United States, and it is in the final stages of repositioning the firm from Williams Company to Williams Visual Solutions. As part of this business transformation, Williams is adding robust integrated Web-based toolsets for multi-media services while also focusing on specific vertical markets and select customer applications.

David Smith, Director of Business Development, explained, "When you are re-launching your brand, you need to build awareness in the community. Smart businesses frequently leverage high-visibility sponsorships to drive awareness and ultimately business results. That's what we decided to do to extend our reach."

Williams Visual Solutions partnered with University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) and Open Web Education Alliance (OWEA) for the International Web Education Rocks 5-day Summit in August 2009. The company worked with GPA to promote and use Ultra-Green Rock Stock and provided branded promotional materials, mailings, and posters. Williams also developed conference programs and kiosks. The event was tweeted about on Twitter, had its own Facebook page, and had cross-promotions on Williams, UTC, and OWEA Web sites.

Figure 2: Williams Visual Solutions' Web Education Rocks Promotion



Williams also worked with Erlanger Healthcare and T.C. Thompson Children's Hospital for the Taste of Hamilton Place event in September 2009. Williams provided design, print, and Web services; gave out 75 pairs of tickets to employees and customers; got radio exposure for the new brand; and created signage for placement throughout the largest mall in Tennessee.

Figure 3: Williams Visual Solutions' Taste of Hamilton Place Event



In today's tough and results-driven economy, a merged marketplace and limited dollars sponsorships can drive awareness. The ROI might be harder to measure, but these strategies can deliver results. Williams clearly used the sponsorship and active event participation to build its new brand.

A Lot of PAZAZZ

PAZAZZ is a full-service independent printer based in Montreal, Canada. Founded in 1992, the company has grown from one man and his machine to a diverse team of experts from a variety of fields. The company provides clients with conventional and UV 56" offset (paper, plastics, board and flute up to 48 pts), flexo and digital labels, digital, and digital large format printing combined with a host of services including variable data, direct mail support, Web-to-print, finishing, kitting, and fulfillment.

PAZAZZ Founder and CEO Warren Werbitt promotes a unique work environment, encouraging every employee to bring his/her expertise and style to every project. This makes for a happy team that is eager to give clients the most dynamic and personalized services possible.

According to Werbitt, "PAZAZZ is passionate about print, and we have a reputation for promoting the print industry in some unconventional ways. We have been an early adopter of social media to drive the visibility of PAZAZZ as well as the importance of print in the overall media mix."

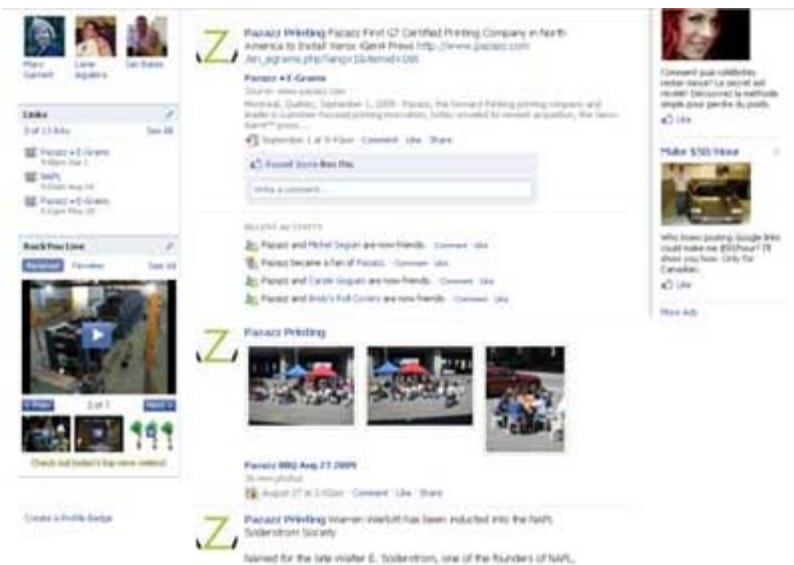
If you haven't seen Warren's "[Printing's Alive](#)" video, it can be accessed via YouTube. It was posted and went viral on January 7, 2008. By October 2009, the video had attracted over 190,000 views, more than 200 comments, and 1,000 e-mails. It has been shown at conferences all over the world and was recently inducted into Marketing Sherpa Viral Hall of Fame.

Figure 4: Warren Werbitt's "Printing's Alive" Video on YouTube



PAZAZZ is also an active Twitter user. Werbitt stated, "You might be saying, I can't get my head around this... how can I begin to use Twitter for my business when it is already being used by so many people who talk about their latest lunches, songs they're listening to, and other trivial matters? The trick is to have a strategy around Twitter. We tweet about our major events, and I'm finding that the local media has been picking them up. For example, PAZAZZ tweeted about becoming the first G7 certified printing company to install a Xerox iGEN4. All of a sudden, there was a column about us in the newspaper." PAZAZZ is finding that having a presence on sites like Twitter and Facebook is good publicity.

Figure 5: PAZAZZ Printing Post on Facebook



Werbitt concluded, "The print future is in our hands. It's not just about digital, variable, offset, inks, or the latest technology. It's about effectively communicating, getting noticed, taking action, and making things happen."

The Bottom Line

In challenging economic times, building awareness of who you are, what you do, and how well you do it has never been more important. Innovative customer communication techniques are essential to building awareness and driving demand for products and services at a competitive price. Ideal Printing, Williams Visual Communications, and PAZAZZ have demonstrated that "out of the box" marketing communications can deliver business results. A sales call or direct mailer is not enough in today's market. Effective marketing requires a blend of multi-channel communications, networking, event marketing, social networks,

and sites like YouTube and Twitter to get your name out in the market and create a lasting impression.

Barb Pellow is available for speaking engagements and consulting projects. To get more information [contact us](#).

Please offer your feedback to Barb. She can be reached at barb@whattheythink.com.

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