

Technology Times

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The column below, by Jennifer Guinan, should remind you that recessions can make you “penny-wise and pound foolish” when it comes to marketing and PR. By cutting your investments in marketing, you may concede the playing field to the competition – and lose far more than you gain. Now’s the time to spend, but spend wisely.

Few writers and marketers are as talented as Jennifer, and almost none will manage your expectations so realistically (in other words: she won’t BS you.)



**ROB
McCORD**

Rob McCord is a Managing Director of Pennsylvania Early Stage Partners and is President of the Eastern Technology Council.

Jennifer’s iron-willed, pragmatic approach can help you raise revenues through PR, direct and channel marketing, and other lead-generating strategies.

Jennifer’s innovative work has earned her the loyalty of many impressive clients, and read-

ers can gain much from Jennifer’s extensive experience working in the telecomm, software, and semiconductor industries.

I hope readers seriously consider the advice of experts such as Jennifer Guinan. (And as you consider cost-effective PR and marketing channels, please remember to consider the Technology Council itself!)

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GUEST COLUMN

Bye, bye buzz: The new marketing reality

By Jennifer Guinan
*President, Sage
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A year ago, many high tech companies sounded like Muhammad Ali, yelling that they were “the greatest!” One big difference: Ali could back up his boasting. Many high tech companies proved last year that they could not.

When these companies were on the receiving end of 2001’s incredible back-to-back blows – the downturn in the economy and the attack on America on September 11 – many of their marketing and PR activities went down for the count.

When the economy turned sour, some companies chose to go into stealth mode, completely disappearing, leaving marketing campaigns unfinished. While rumors flew from



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disgruntled laid-off employees, no one at the company stepped forward to set the record straight, leaving the press, industry analysts and customers jittery. After Sept. 11, the mood of the country changed and so did the way business was conducted. There is a renewed focus on value, ROI, and cost accountability. Tech companies found that the expensive and noisy campaigns of the boom years weren’t possible with new budget constraints, didn’t generate solid leads to justify their cost, and in some cases were simply distasteful.

Tech companies are now looking to regroup their communications efforts in this new era. Before considering where to spend your precious marketing dollars, first go back to basics. Take the time now to ensure you understand what you are trying to achieve. What are the business goals in light of all these world changes, and how can communications outreach help achieve those goals? Truly examine your company’s value propositions and messaging umbrella. Are they clear, concise, and on target? Do they tell a compelling story? Do customers care in the way you perceive them to?

If your company is like 99 percent of tech companies today, your focus is on generating leads, leads, leads. Filming a Super Bowl commercial or branding a sock puppet is financially out of the question. You need

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programs that achieve your goals and fit your budget. Typically, the best bang for your buck will come from very well-executed public relations and direct marketing efforts. When compared with advertising, PR and direct marketing are low-cost, high-impact, and very effective.

On the PR front, there are some new challenges. Business publications typically don't care about your story any more unless it's really bad. It's better to focus on the technical PR front but realize the game here has also changed. The technical trade press has faced its own economic turmoil. The result of rising production costs and shrinking ad revenues is that half as many pages are available for editorial content as a year ago. Many publications reduced editorial staff, leaving fewer editors with larger beats. When pitching stories to the press, tech companies are finding that editors who traditionally were skeptical are even more so today. Pitches without clear value and credibility are ignored. Increasingly, copy is being focused on companies that have a compelling story and can explain the impact of their technology on customers and the macro trends that affect society and the economy.

Now is also the time to look at

who is pitching your story. Is it someone who truly understands your business objectives and customer needs, and can grasp your technology? Large agencies have great portfolios and clip books, but it is impossible for the experienced senior staff who sold you the contract to stay abreast of every client's minutiae. Often, clients find themselves working day to day with junior staff.

Boutique agencies and independent consultants can offer terrific value, while providing a hands-on approach. Look for someone who focuses on a particular set of technologies that fit your needs, not just technology in general. Look critically at their clips and compare what they accomplish for companies that are similar to yours in size and age. Seek references from editors who have worked with the agency. Make sure your goals are understood and your business and PR philosophies are similar. Look for someone with a consultative approach to be a true extension of your organization. Remember, they represent you to the press and analysts.

As the coverage you achieve in the technical press is even more precious today, PR remains a very cost-effective lead-generating device. It is extremely credible and has extensive

reach. And if your pitch person and spokesperson do their jobs, your messages and value propositions are communicated to your target markets.

Direct marketing is another strong option. Your entire campaign is dependent upon finding the right targets. It doesn't matter how pretty your six-color mailer is, it simply won't work if you don't have the right mailing list. Next, worry about the message. If you don't have your act together regarding your compelling message platform, your campaign will be toast no matter how many folds and colors the mailer has. If you have the right list and the right message, you will achieve results.

All and all, now is not the time to despair. It is the time, however, to get back to good solid business development: defining goals, honing clear messages, expanding customer knowledge, and focusing on value-driven outreach. And the most cost-effective outreach and lead generation method for technology companies these days is not hype, not buzz, not noise. It's good, solid, credible lead generation techniques and effective communication programs done right.