

Brand Building, the PR way. 5 Things Clients Need to Change.

By Laura Ries

Today the way to launch a brand is with PR, not advertising. But launching a brand with public relations and launching a brand with advertising are two totally different things.

You can't just replace advertising with PR. You have to change your entire method of introducing new brands.

Getting clients to let go of what they learned in Advertising 101 is not easy to do. Advertising and marketing are so entwined inside the minds of managers that many won't even consider the possibility of launching a new brand without a massive advertising program.

Yet we strongly recommend that all new brands be introduced with PR only. A PR launch invariably involves five steps.

Change 1. Identify the enemy.

If you want to build a successful brand, it's important to define your enemy. That is, the competitive brand or company or category that will keep your own brand from being successful.

If you're selling Pepsi-Cola, your enemy is Coca-Cola. If you're selling Burger King, your enemy is McDonald's. And so forth.

Defining an enemy allows you to focus your strategy, which should be the opposite of your enemy. When Procter & Gamble launched a new mouthwash, they decided the enemy was Listerine, the bad-tasting mouthwash. So P&G positioned Scope as the good tasting mouthwash and it became a strong No. 2 brand. When Lowe's was launched, Home Depot was the enemy. Home Depot is messy and male oriented. So Lowe's became neat, bright and female oriented and became a strong No. 2.

Controversy creates news. Having an enemy greatly enhances the PR potential of a brand. The original title of our public relations book was "The PR Era." But who's the enemy?

So we changed the title to "The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR" creating both an enemy and a lot of publicity potential.

Advertising is the opposite. Consumers hate it when you single out a competitor to attack in one of your ads. It's all right for the media to do so, but not for an advertiser.

Change 2. Leak the brand.

A PR program usually starts with a leak to key reporters and editors. Newsletters and Internet sites are favorite targets.

The media loves inside stories that describe events that are going to happen. Especially when it's an exclusive. In other words, a scoop.

That's the way Microsoft introduced its Xbox. Rumors about the new videogame player first circulated in 1999. In March of the following year, Bill Gates talked about the Xbox at the Game Developers Expo.



The Xbox was not unveiled in full until the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January 2001. But it wasn't until November 15 of that year that you could actually buy one. The official launch was on that date in New York Times Square's Toys "R" Us. In the last six weeks of the year, over 1.5 million units were sold.

You waste an enormous resource if you don't leak details of your new product or service to the media. What do people like to talk about? Rumors, gossip, inside information. It's the same with the media.

Advertising is the opposite. An advertising program is normally launched like a D-day attack. It's usually kept a top secret until the day the first ad runs.

You risk alienating consumers if you advertise a product that can't be bought.

Change 3. Tolerate a slow buildup.

A PR program slowly unfolds like a flower blooming. A company has to allot enough time for a PR program to develop momentum. That's why a PR launch often starts months before the details of a new product or service are firmly fixed.

With PR, you don't have a choice. Unless you have an earth-shattering invention, you have to start slowly and hope the media coverage will gradually expand. (If you do have an earth-shattering invention, you probably don't need PR at all. The word will get out regardless of what you do.)

Fortunately this slow build-up is consistent with the way most consumers learn about new products and services. A news item here, a mention from a friend there and pretty soon you are convinced you have known about the product forever.

Advertising is the opposite. An advertising program usually starts with a "big bang," often with a Super Bowl ad.

Since consumers tend to ignore advertising messages, a new ad program has to be big and bold enough to get above the "noise level." The easiest thing to hide in America is a million dollars worth of advertising. If you divide the million into small chunks and then spend the money in many different media, your messages will disappear into an advertising black hole.

Change 4: Recruit allies.

Why go it alone when you can get others to help you communicate your message?

The slow buildup of a PR program allows enough time to recruit allies to your cause. Furthermore, the publicity you receive will often attract volunteers.

Who are your natural allies? "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." When we wrote *The Fall of Advertising* book, we asked ourselves who might be the enemy of such a book.

The obvious enemy is the advertising conglomerate, the ones who control the bulk of advertising expenditures in the U.S. Who might be the enemy of these ad conglomerates? It's the independent PR firms that have been losing business to the PR subsidiaries of these ad conglomerates.

So we sent advance copies of our book to the 124 largest independent PR firms in the country and followed up with copies of media stories about the book.

These mailings generated a lot of response along the lines of "We'll buy copies to send to clients and prospects, we'll invite you to make speeches at industry meetings, we'll write letters to the editors of trade publications, etc."

Advertising is the opposite. An advertising program has a difficult time recruiting allies. There are two problems: time and money.

With a big bang launch, there usually isn't enough time to line up supporters. Also, advertising alliances usually fall apart over the question of who pays for what.

Change 5. Allow for modification of the message.

When you launch a new product, you usually find that you have a range of attributes that you could attach to the brand.

Which one attribute should you focus on?

This is the sort of question that can stir up endless hours of debate in the boardroom. Too often the question is ducked and the brand is launched with a smorgasbord of attributes. Or a decision is made that turns out to be totally wrong. There's a certain lack of objectivity in the boardroom.

The media can be extremely helpful. Which attribute does a reporter or an editor think is most important? After all, the media looks at new products from the consumer's point of view. Their opinions are not only helpful, but are likely to prove extremely convincing to prospects. They hold the reins of consumer opinion. You cross them at your own peril.

Volvo spent years advertising the durability of Volvo automobiles. Yet the media fell in love with the safety aspects of Volvo cars. They carried stories about Volvo's invention of the 3-point lap and shoulder seat belt, the collapsible steering column, front and rear crumple zones, etc.

Volvo finally threw in the durability towel and switched their advertising to focus on the safety issue. Volvo sales took off.

Forget focus groups. Why pay consumers for advice when the media will give it to you for free. Furthermore, the media will back up their advice with stories that will plant your ideas in the prospect's mind.

Should you ever go against media advice? Sure, but when you do, you'd better have a good reason to do so.

Advertising is the opposite. Once launched, an advertising program is cast in stone. It's difficult, expensive and embarrassing to try to change strategies and messages in the middle of an advertising campaign.

Laura Ries is president of Ries & Ries, an Atlanta-based marketing strategy firm that she runs with her father and partner Al Ries.

Laura attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois where she graduated "with highest distinction" from Northwestern's School of Speech in 1993, finishing in the top 2% of her class.

After graduation, Laura worked at TBWA Advertising in New York City as an account executive on the Woolite and Evian brands.

In 1994, Laura partnered with her father to form Ries & Ries. Together they have consulted with many Fortune 500 companies. They have also written four books: *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* (1998), *The 11 Immutable Laws of Internet Branding* (2000), *The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR* (2002) and *The Origin of Brands* (2004)

The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR, has generated enormous interest in the marketing community. The book made both the *Business Week* and *The Wall Street Journal* bestseller lists. In addition to being reviewed by these publications, it was also reviewed by *USA Today*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Sun-Times* and many other publications.

Laura's latest release, *The Origin of Brands* explores "divergence," the best way to create a new brand. The concept is analogous to the creation of a new species, as pioneered by Charles Darwin in his classic book on the subject. In 2002, *Business 2.0* named Laura a "management guru" and issued trading cards with her picture and statistics on them.

Laura has appeared on the Fox News Channel, CNBC, ABC World News Tonight and makes regular appearances as a branding expert on CNN. She is a frequently quoted marketing expert in the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Associated Press, Advertising Age, and other publications. In addition to her consulting, speaking and writing, Laura enjoys athletic activities like horseback riding, triathlons, body building and snow skiing.

Laura resides in Roswell, Georgia with her family.

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