

**ANOTHER MARKETING TOOL FROM
THE MARKETING BIT**

~ COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY SELECTION OUTLINE ~

OR SSO



Communications Strategy Selection Outline or SSO

What is the SSO?

Defining a communications strategy for your company is one of the most important and valuable steps you can take. Without such an evaluation, most communications fall flat. With such an evaluation, all of your communications will be targeted, amplified and will have a stronger chance of breaking through market clutter. When we say “all communications”, we mean ALL. The SSO is not just for print advertising or brochures. We’re talking about your web site, your videos and your blog, any communications where you are speaking to your target audience(s).

Think of the SSO as a simple process of painting a bulls-eye for all of your communications. You want to aim for the sweet spot in the center. Some strategies may come close, but are not a bulls-eye. Other strategies may sound good on the surface, but will fall apart once you do an objective evaluation that includes the competitive environment and the possible messages. Out of this process, you will find the right message, which you should be using in all of your communications efforts. In so doing, you will be creating better performing communications be it in ads, direct mail, web site pages, blog articles, radio spots, article marketing, videos, social media tools or whatever communications tools you elect to use.

Don’t go through this process once and assume you’ll never have to do it again. Think again. As long as your marketplace is dynamic (and all are), you will need to continue to tweak and refine your SSO to adjust to new competitors, changes in your audience, new markets that you may want to reach. This is the nature of the communications beast.

How does it work?

The SSO has you evaluate and identify the three very critical communications components. These three components are the foundation for all effective advertising, and they are the:

1. Target audience
2. Competition
3. Unique message

Let’s take a deeper look at each component.

Target Audience – Who do you want to reach and describe them in detail

Your target audiences are those you want to reach, sell, pull-in to your store or business. As a business, you can easily have several target audiences. You may want to reach women, but in order to tailor an effective communications message; a broad target audience (e.g. women) needs to be more clearly segmented or narrowed.

How does one go about more clearly defining their audiences? You could use any number of variables. Take a look at the demographics of your IDEAL customers. You know the ones. Those that typically represent 20% of your customers, yet represent 80% of your sales volume. What characteristics would you use to describe them? Rich, poor, tall, short, male, female, green activists, business minded.

One standard way to define one's audience is to use demographics such as: age, income, or gender. Perhaps ownership of a particular product will make a difference in tailoring your message, such as: home ownership, pet ownership, bike owners, etc. If you are in the service business, then you may want to target those most likely seeking your services, such as those experiencing: bone loss, teeth pain, in need of new glasses, investment advice, unsightly aging, etc.

Psychographics can be very effective in defining your audience. What are psychographics? Psychographics are any feelings or attitudes your audience may have about you, your competitors or the products, services you offer. Do they like to do good things for the environment? Are they adventure or thrill seekers? Are they vegans because they can't stand the thought of harming an animal? Does your product/service tap into these attitudes?

Are you beginning to get the picture? The more detail you can use to describe your target audience, the more effective your advertising will be in reaching them and in grabbing their attention.

As an example: If you sell to or service females, ask yourself if you want to reach women 18 to 24 years of age or women 35 to 54 years of age? If you sell to other businesses, do you want to reach small business owners or executives in large corporations? The issues of young

women versus older women are entirely different as are the issues of small business owners versus highly paid executives in large corporations. You need to clearly identify and describe your target audiences so that your message targets and speaks directly to them.

You may know that your product or service offerings span both young and older women. Okay. But which represent your IDEAL customer? If you still feel that you must target both audiences, then design two strategies, each with a tailored message. One communication speaks to and targets young women while the other ad is specifically designed to reach older women. Do you see how the words, the media used, perhaps even the graphics, everything about the two communications needs to be tailored to the specific audience?

Competition – Who are your direct competitors with this target audience? Who will you take share away from?

Again, the more definition you can use to describe your competitors the more effective your communications will be. So, how would you describe your competitors? Which are direct competitors? Are they larger than you, offering your target audience greater choice? Or are they smaller with limited offerings but faster delivery? What is your competitive advantage when compared to these competitors?

Don't overlook the fact that sometimes your competition will not be brick and mortar competitors, but it may come in the form of the current mind set of your target audience. An example might be the current recessionary times. If this is the case, then your competition is the fear, the apathy, the concern your target audience is feeling. Your communications needs to break through those feelings before presenting them with your solution.

As with target audiences, you may also have different segments of competitors. Some competitors might be small and nimble, while others are large with matching reputations. Match the competitors up with their most likely audience segment. As an example: One strategy may be targeting 18-24 women most likely to use smaller competitors while older women prefer larger, more established competitors. Your particular competitive environment may or may not be that easy to segment, but it is a critical factor that can make a difference in how the copy is written and the finished ad. So give this some thought.

Message – What differentiates your business from your competitors while motivating your audience to take action? What benefit will your audience achieve by selecting you over others? What action do you want them to take?

Now that you know your target audience(s) and your primary competitor(s), you are ready to craft some communications messages.

A good question to ask yourself when you are trying to craft messages is: What is the one thing that differentiates you, your business, from your competitors that also serves as a sufficient benefit to motivate your target audience to take some desired action?

Note that you are not trying to create copy at this stage. You are just trying to identify your competitive strength that will create some traction with your target audience(s). This unique strength may vary across target audiences, so put it down on the SSO worksheet and continue to hone and refine until you feel that the message is hitting the sweet spot of the bulls-eye.

Your message should communicate one clear and concise benefit to your target and not some long laundry list of benefits you think might motivate your audiences to take action. Remember the sweet spot. You want to zero-in on the sweet spot for each audience segment.

Rationale and Selection of the Best Strategy

Once you have created as many different messages (strategies) as you can, select the strongest and write down your reasoning as to why you believe this strategy will or will not work so you have a record of your thinking. You want your rationale to be as objective and unbiased as is possible. Ideally, you will have others (impartial parties) review both your strategies and your rationale. Sleep on it. Talk about it and discuss the pros and cons of the various strategies with others, whose opinions you respect before you make your final decision.

Communications is not Sales

Often, business owners confuse advertising with sales. Communications efforts do NOT make sales. I repeat, communications do NOT make sales. These efforts are designed to do one or more of the following:

- Create awareness of your business/product
- Position you, your product in the marketplace
- Generate interest, consideration and/or trial

Customers are not made overnight and they certainly are not made by just hearing or reading one of your advertisement or receiving one direct mail piece from you. The role of communications is to create warm and responsive targets over time so once they take action, (e.g. visit your web site, are in your store, in your office, etc.) you or your staff can make the sale.

Creative Talent may not like SSO

Be forewarned that there are many freelance creative types who are very skilled at graphics, or perhaps copy who will not appreciate the SSO exercise. Why? Unfortunately, just because someone has graphic skills does not mean they understand how best to market. As a result, some will view the SSO process as restricting their creative talents. These folks also tend to come up with great looking communications and big headlines that don't really have a strategy. Lacking a strategy, the communications are more like the blue-plate special of the day, rather than a long-term campaign that continues to build on itself, thereby maximizing your dollars and your communications efforts.

So, if you share your SSO exercise with freelance creative persons (and I would encourage you to do so), be certain to explain that you are only going to proceed with communications that match with your selected strategy. You may be open to discussing better, stronger strategies, but you are only interested in long-term strategies and not flash-in-the-pan ads. If they don't respond accordingly, find another creative who will respond. Ideally, you want to find creative talent that is also marketing oriented and will become a collaborative partner in your all communications.

It is your hard earned dollars that will pay for both the creative effort as well as the execution of the communications. So you have the right to guide the creative effort and to demand what you want. In so doing, you also take on the responsibility for the success or failure of your communications, which is how it should be. After all, it is your business.

The SSO Form

A sample of the SSO form can be found on page 7 of this document. Use this form or make-up your own and you may have as many strategies for each target audience as you can create. Initially, you may only want to develop two or three strategies per target audience. Otherwise, it may become too confusing and the strategies will be too diluted to achieve any measureable results. With practice, you will find there are dozens of possible strategies. Which one best fits you and your audience.

You may also come up with some strategies that won't stand-up to a critical or objective evaluation, which is fine. That is why you are doing this exercise...to get you and your communications focused on what really does matter to your audience and to your communications efforts.

If this document has been helpful to you, please let me know by dropping me an [email](#) or visiting [The Marketing Bit blog](#) and sending me a message. I would love to hear from you.

If you need assistance in crafting your communications strategies, feel free to contact me as well. I welcome the opportunity to guide, clarify and coach you in the development of your communications strategies.

Sheila Hibbard
The Marketing Bit

SSO FORM

	Strategy One	Strategy Two	Strategy Three
<p>Target Audience What are their demographics, psychographics?</p>			
<p>Competitors Who are your direct competitors with this audience?</p> <p>Are there emotional barriers that act as a competitive force?</p>			
<p>Message What differentiates you and serves as a sufficient benefit to motivate your audience to take action?</p> <p>What action do you want this audience to take?</p>			
<p>Rationale Why is this strategy good?</p> <p>What are the pros and cons of this strategy?</p> <p>Are there better strategies?</p>			