

## The True Value of Integrated Brand Communications

By Len Johnson, President and CEO of JDG Communications

As marketing communications professionals, we know that our work is vital to the success of our organizations. Without strong name recognition and reputations, resilient messages, and innovative ways to communicate with key audiences, companies and organizations struggle to achieve their business goals.

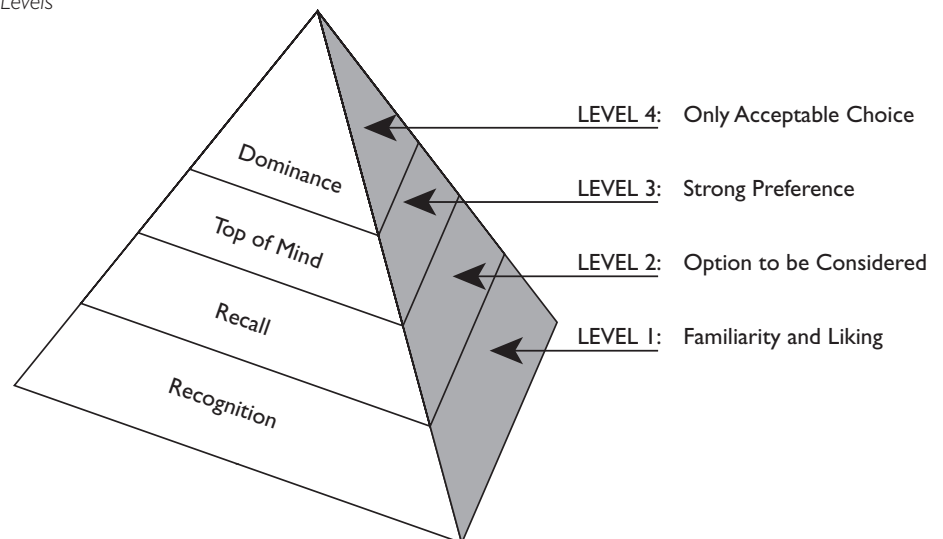
The problem is how do we demonstrate and quantify the true value of integrated marketing communications in a results-oriented business environment? It's not good enough for us to simply create a brochure, place a news article, or develop an advertising campaign. Our challenge is to identify the value of these activities in business terms and make them imperative to our organizations' mission and financial well-being.

To find the answer, change just one word in your vocabulary. Rather than integrated "marketing" communications, try integrated "brand" communications. This one word can mean a world of difference. Marketing may be a tool, but a brand is a business asset that can be measured and increase in value if it's properly nurtured and managed. Now, that's something CEOs, CFOs, sales, and other professionals in your organization can understand and embrace.

### YOUR BRAND

According to renowned advertising and marketing strategists Al and Laura Ries, "Marketing is branding." In fact, they claim that the two are so inextricably linked that it is impossible to separate them. This is why your company should approach marketing communications programs with a brand focus. This establishes an identity, position, promise, and message that can be communicated clearly and consistently throughout all promotional activities across a broad range of audiences. To achieve this, companies need to create a brand that is both distinct and defensible. As a new brand is developed and introduced to the market, it can progress through four different levels (see Figure 1) from the bottom to the top of the brand pyramid. The result is increased overall awareness of your organization and it's message, which drives qualified leads to express their consideration and preference before engaging in the purchasing process—thus, streamlining the sales cycle.

Figure 1: Brand Pyramid Levels



## BRAND BENEFITS

A strong brand provides organizations with a number of important internal and external benefits that ultimately lead to strong market awareness and increased market share. The benefits include:

- **A clearer organization-wide focus** that provides your company and each employee with a mission that is both consistent and results-driven.
- **Greater trust** among customers, prospects, and employees because your company's brand promise delivers the expected, desired results.
- **Deeper loyalty** among the same important audiences because trust and loyalty are emotional decisions that are inextricably linked.
- **Higher return on investment (ROI)** because strong brands are less price sensitive and more likely to get selected.
- **Increased success rates with new products and programs** because they are introduced at the preference level of the sales funnel (see page 4), leapfrogging the awareness and consideration stages.
- **Enhanced company value** because that can be measured by sales, as well as various Brand Value and Brand Equity evaluation methods. (Interbrand does an annual brand valuation survey of Fortune 100 companies published in Business Week magazine. They take the public value of a company and then subtract the value of all physical assets reported on the company's balance sheet to arrive at the "intangible value" that Interbrand attributes to "brand value.")

Your brand actually can be more valuable to your company than your products or services.

Here are a few examples of strong brands:

- Coca-Cola's brand value is far larger than the value of all of its physical assets (bottling plants, delivery trucks, etc).
- IBM's strong brand allowed it to seamlessly make the transition from consumer computer hardware industry leader to a giant in the business consulting and services area.
- Sony is so well known in the consumer electronic industry that potential purchasers value its brand promise to deliver high-quality products more than specific features of particular products.
- Finally, who reading this white paper does not remember Maytag's reputation for bored repairmen and reliable products? Consumers were brought up knowing more about the ho-hum daily activities of the bored repairmen than the specific features of Maytag washers and dryers. But, they got the point, bought Maytag products, and the company became an industry leader.

## BRAND DEVELOPMENT

There are many entire books devoted to the topic of brand development, so we can hardly do justice to this topic in a white paper. However, here's a high-level checklist of things to consider when developing your brand:

- What is your company's current brand?
- What are your current brand's positive attributes?
- What are the negative attributes of your current brand?
- Do your company's positive brand attributes outweigh the negative attributes?

- What are your company's future goals and plans?
- What does your company want to be known for in the future?
- What new brand promise does your company want to offer?
- Is this new brand promise realistic, achievable, and defensible?
- Does your brand distinguish your company from the competition?
- How significant is the change from your current brand and your desired brand?
- Are there obstacles to implementing this brand change and will it be difficult?
- What are the messages that need to be conveyed to affect this change?
- With whom should you be communicating?
- What are the best communication tools to deploy?
- What media are the best to convey your new brand?
- How do you determine if the change in brand is successful?

Once you have determined the answers to these questions, you should conduct customer interviews and surveys to answer many of the same questions. The results are the foundation of brand development. There are six basic steps:

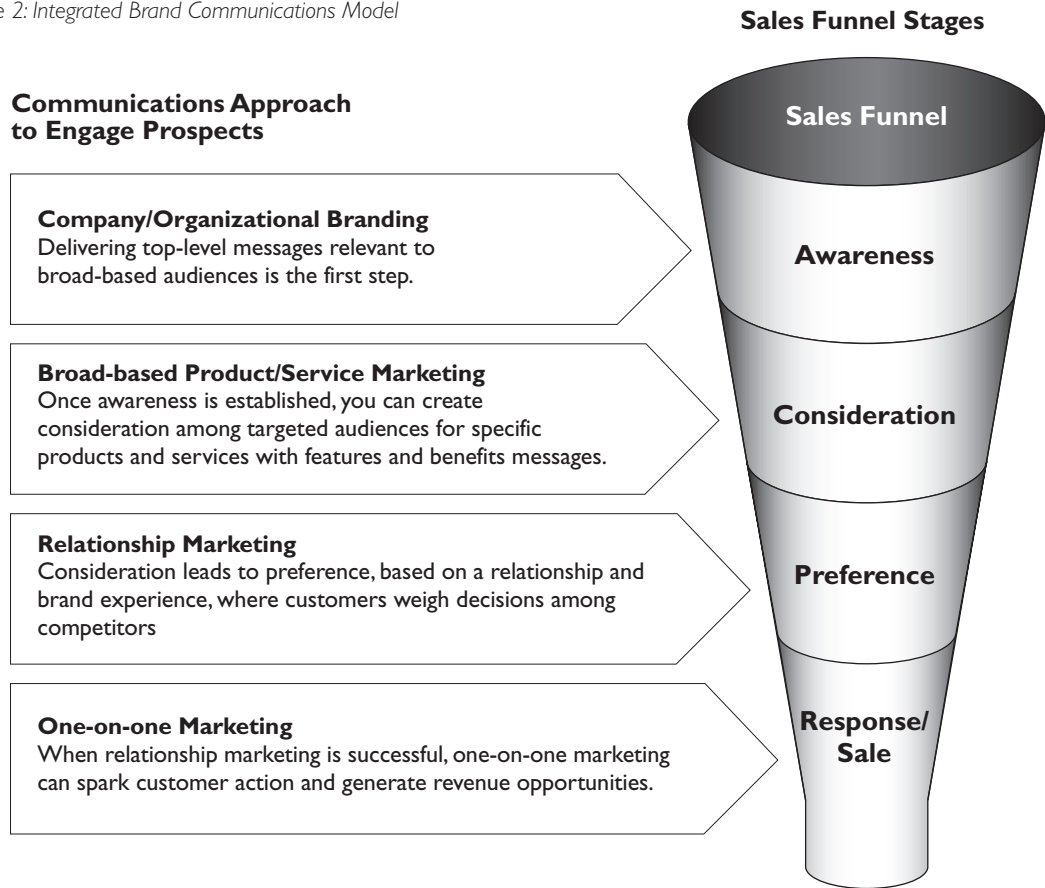
1. **Research and Assessment**—internal and external
2. **Strategy and Planning**—markets, audiences, goals, and strategic vision
3. **Message Development**—the most effective words you can use to convey information to target audiences
4. **Concept and Creative**—theme, logo, and look and feel
5. **Implementation and Execution**—integrated brand communications plan (see next page)
6. **Monitor and Measurement**—the success of the overall program, as well as individual tactical components

## **INTEGRATED BRAND COMMUNICATIONS**

Your company's brand should be implemented using an integrated brand communications program that will allow your company to establish relationships with diverse segments of its target markets by conveying consistent messages through the most effective and appropriate channels. For instance, some key prospects may rely on industry publications, and they can be reached through advertising and media relations. Others may listen only to industry and product analysts, so analyst tours can be important. Still, others may prefer to attend trade shows and workshops, so a strong event presence is appropriate. Some may rely on all of these channels. Integrated brand communications permits companies to build critical frequency of consistent, targeted messages to all of their key audiences.

To understand how an integrated brand communications approach (see Figure 2) works, imagine a funnel through which sales opportunities pass. The funnel is broken into four areas representing various stages of the sales cycle (awareness, consideration, preference, and sale). As prospects pass through the funnel, they become increasingly qualified and more likely to respond to your offer. An integrated brand communications strategy requires various approaches to your communications that effectively engage the prospect in a meaningful way at each stage of the sales cycle. The value of branding is that over time, you can build a base of prospects who are engaged at the preference level and are close to the point of purchasing action.

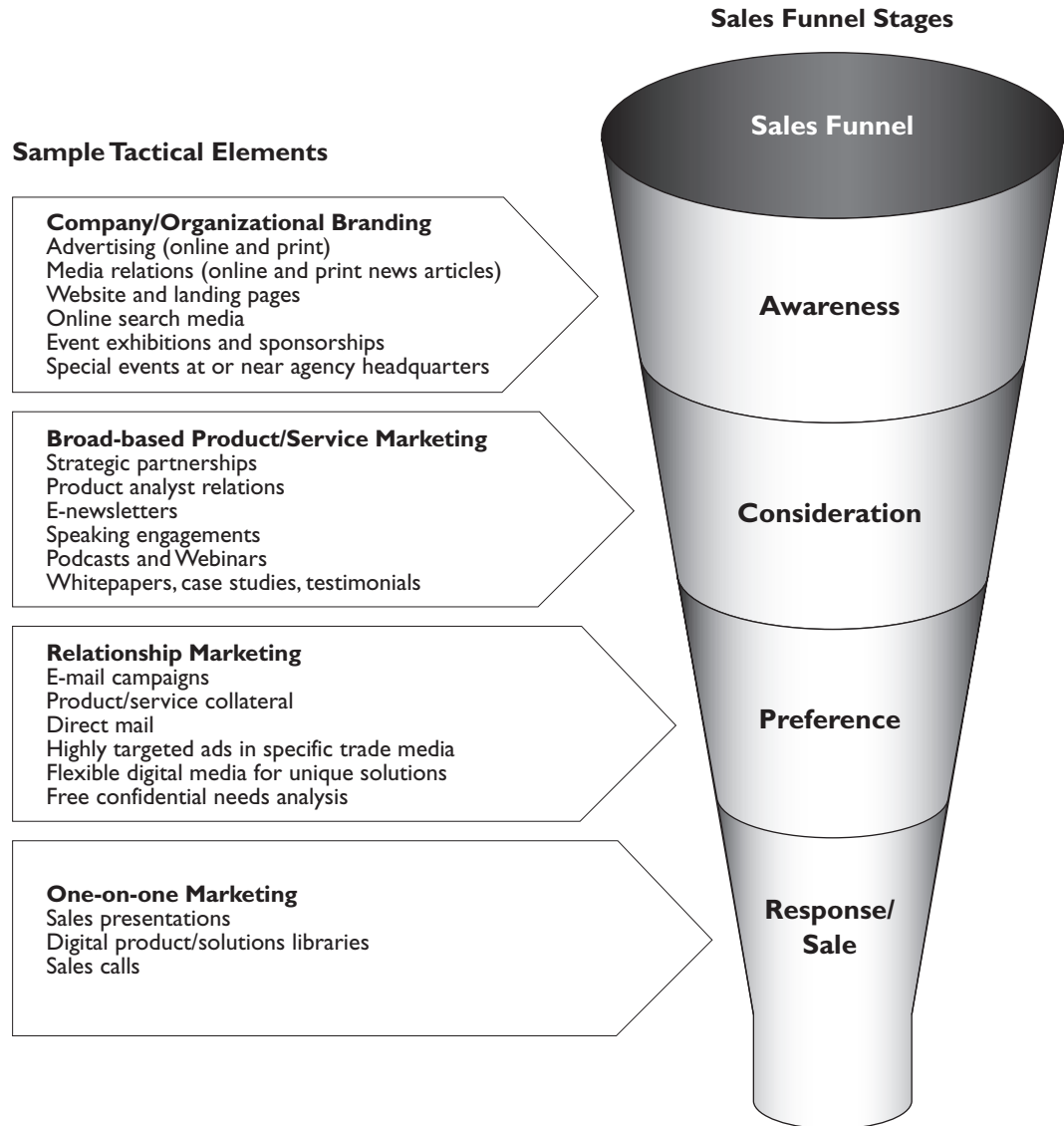
Figure 2: Integrated Brand Communications Model



Each step through the Sales Funnel of the Integrated Brand Communications Model has tactical elements to engage the prospect. These elements should be outlined in a marketing communication plan with specific messages, target audiences, preferred channels, calls to action, and budgets.

Through an Integrated Brand Communications approach, your company or organization can deliver top-level and unique brand messages for each specific audience through a variety of tactical elements, including online and print advertising, news and bylined article placement, white papers, case studies, and Webinars designed to create awareness and consideration of your solutions. In addition, you can reach prospects through highly targeted e-mail campaigns, specific high-end direct mail, flexible digital media marketing activities that can be tailored for one specific client, and unique sales presentations that will result in preference and sales.

Figure 3: Integrated Brand Communications Tactics



**BRAND VALUE SUMMARY**

Integrated Brand Communications can help a marketing communications professional answer the million dollar question: “What is the value of my work to my organization?” The tangible result is increased sales. Thus, the importance of our work goes beyond the realm of perceived benefit to become an identifiable business asset. That’s a change that CEOs, CFOs, and COOs easily will understand and appreciate.

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