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FOR GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN PROFESSIONALS

5 Tips for Effective Technology Marketing

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Dare I invoke the buzz words “synergy” or “win-win”? Cooperating in the marketing environment can provide a powerful boost to communications effectiveness, because two aligned companies can often generate greater interest and credibility among their audiences or networks than individually.

Some of the best examples are trade consortiums. Those can be tough to create and manage, but here are some simpler examples from the tech arena:

Hitching to a customer’s innovation

Hitachi Semiconductor was perennially seeking innovative users of their chips to demonstrate the company’s advanced process technology, particularly in industrial product applications. Along came a clever customer in Win Systems, of Arlington, Texas. Win had designed a compact, single-board computer for use in harsh environments, using Hitachi’s chips almost exclusively. It was an industry first with particular appeal among industrial control systems designers. Hitachi’s sales and marketing team dedicated funds and some of their PR agency’s time to help Win Systems promote its new, Hitachi-based industrial computer. Both companies benefited from the substantial trade media coverage. Sales surged for both players.

Partying with the big guys

Before its acquisition by Mentor Graphics Corp. , Microtec Research, of Santa Clara, Calif., was an independent electronic design automation (EDA) software firm. The company planned an informal gathering of executives from two other firms with whom it cooperated in marketing at the Embedded Systems Conference. Working many weeks in advance of the conference, Microtec lined up an executive from Intel Corp. (Nasdaq: INTC) and a vice president from a distributor of Microtec’s products. They offered out-of-town editors attending the conference an opportunity to meet in a relaxed classy environment, the Tony Bennett room of the Fior D’Italia in San Francisco’s North Beach, the oldest Italian restaurant in town.

Editors were picked up by limos outside the convention center and whisked to the restaurant, where they met the three companies’ execs. After three hours of old San Francisco ambiance, wonderful Italian cuisine, and easy-going business conversation, but no sales pitches, the editors were chauffeured to their hotels. The result was Microtec Research gained substantial share of mind with key industry pundits. A contributed feature article in an important publication later resulted from the contact. For several years influential people asked when another such event would be planned. By inviting the other two companies, Microtec Research greatly broadened the appeal.

By involving Intel, a much larger and better known company, Microtec demonstrated its strong relationships with industry leaders, gaining greater credibility in the process.

Creating coattails opportunities

Is your company or client associated with, or licensing its technology to, major industry heavyweights? If so, attempt to get the partner's sales and marketing people to see the marketing advantage of jointly announcing and demonstrating the customer values of the relationship. There's mileage and likely greater media coverage to be gained by working together.

The licensee gets to tell the world about how smart it is by applying new technology to its future products. It gains industry attention and sends a clear signal to the market that it will soon be making new products with distinct advantages. This approach should not be confused with a product announcement. The licensee may not want to reveal its product plans. That can still work for both players. The agreement can allude to next-generation products without giving away the specific unique benefits or blowing introductory plans.

Is your client planning tradeshow attendance or an industry event but lacking substantive news? Try teaming up with another company -- not a competitor, but one in the same or a related market. A few years ago, two of my clients were planning to attend a major computer tradeshow. Both were thin on news, so we teamed them to deliver a joint executive briefing on an important new technical subject and aimed at attending media and research analysts. The briefing drew nearly double the expected editorial turnout. Many sought-after interviews resulted, and both companies were seen as expert, available resources on this important topic.

Better still, we created opportunities for both companies to communicate directly with a large number of key influencers, building awareness and credibility. Both clients were happy about the event, and the agency was a hero for at least a week following the show. If it had been a single-company attempt, the results wouldn't have even come close.

Software vendors are in a great position to help themselves as well as large hardware vendors at the time of a new computer system introduction. IBM Corp. (NYSE: IBM) or Hewlett-Packard Co. (NYSE: HPQ) has a new computer. Great! What does it do? Here comes an army of smaller companies selling software, which can promote themselves in cooperation with the hardware announcement. The coattail effect helps both hardware and software marketing efforts. Does your company make or sell something that improves another firm's products? Find one and you've got a potential public relations ally.

The tech industry is continually seeking the Holy Grail of new standards. Involvement in standards-setting committees may be the work of engineers and engineering managers, but it's fertile ground for cooperative public relations as well. Standards-setting efforts often need sponsorship. Event hosting or a spokesperson to inform the market of progress are examples of sponsor opportunities. There have been many successful PR campaigns built around trade association sponsorship and standards setting. It's a matter of seizing the opportunity and running with it. Companies that do it effectively are seen as visionary technology leaders. Their reputations grow.

Culture clash

Warning! When planning joint promotional efforts, it's wise to put one company in the lead and have others follow. Rarely will two companies work effectively if given equal roles. Like people, some companies are able to decide and act faster than others. One may have lengthy planning or approval processes for (or objections to) every tactical item. Others tell their public relations pros to "just do it." With one company in the lead you will reduce the possibility for pacing problems, power struggles, and cooperative breakdowns.

Think co-op

Almost any tactical idea may incorporate a cooperative approach. I'm not suggesting you try co-operating with other companies or organizations on everything. Sometimes it's best and almost always faster, to fly solo. However, when the budget is thin, when awareness for your company is low, think about connecting with another organization to make the idea fly. Sports marketing and co-op consumer promotions have known this for decades. Co-op advertising and co-promotions are a huge part of many consumer programs. Stretch your marketing dollars by employing the co-promotions.

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