

How do you launch a brand or product?

Look at the variety of ways in which you can create a launch to suit your product and to maximise marketing.

Successfully building your product or packaging your services are essential ingredients for business success. However, that is not where it all ends. Just because you build a new, improved or newly available product does not mean people will know about it, buy it, or even know why they should.

This is why you need to communicate clearly, effectively and consistently to your potential target market. The first step in a successful launch is communicating what your product does. A new product has both the advantage and disadvantage of being new. No one else may have a similar product, but potential buyers may not clearly understand the benefits of the product. Consider carefully the following questions:

- What does your product or service do for the prospective customer?
- What makes you special or unique?
- What is the message you want to get across to your prospective customers?
- Is it a single product or product line?

You may need to produce product information sheets, brochures or other marketing literature to help educate potential buyers. Take care to explain the product or service using benefits, not features, and point out any key differentiating factors with regard to competition.

The Message

All new brands, be they products, services or a combination of the two, require a larger marketing communication boost in the short term to establish awareness. Without awareness, people will not be enticed to buy, and the last thing you want is your product to just sit on the shelf, assuming it even gets that far. Launching a new brand involves using a number of marketing communications tools, from advertising to sales and internet marketing. Here are some key issues that you should consider well in advance:

- **New Product:** Where a new invention is being launched, not only do you have the challenge of educating your target market about the existence of your offering; you also need to educate them about use of the product and reasons why they should consider purchase. From a launch point of view, the focus would usually be on public relations and perhaps some form of publicity event. A launch function would be mandatory for a new invention as a place for the product to be displayed and demonstrated to both its target market and the media.
- **New Version or Release:** New releases or versions of existing products may be launched via advertising, PR and direct marketing. However, they would not usually involve a specific launch function unless they are a highly complex product requiring detailed demonstration.
- **Consumer:** The launch of a new consumer brand, due to the relatively large size of its target market, would typically comprise advertising to the mass market, perhaps some form of launch function (i.e., a cocktail function or stage presentation) with the media invited, sales promotions at the retail level and within the channel to secure appropriate shelf space. New product acceptance is likely to be easier with an established brand or company name behind it and you should leverage off this position where possible.
- **Business-to-Business:** The launch of a new product and/or brand in the business-to-business world usually focuses more on personal selling, direct marketing and a launch event (i.e., a sit-down or buffet meal, presentation and demonstrations) attended by existing VIP customers and prospective customers and the media. Product launch functions are particularly important where business networking and relationship management are crucial. Typically the launch campaign would be on a smaller and more personal scale than that designed for the consumer market, as the target market is more limited. Business-to-business launches may also centre on an exhibition, conference or seminar where there is the opportunity to display and demonstrate the product.

Major Benefits

Consider the following opportunities that a launch can bring:

- **Focus:** Holding a product launch event allows a specific focus on the new brand versus focus on the rest of your product range or on competing products. It provides a clear platform for the new brand to be introduced and reduces the clutter surrounding the message.
- **Special Event:** A launch event provides the opportunity to invite customers, potential customers and media to a special event, to treat them to something exclusive.
- **Sales Opportunity:** Launch functions are a great place to take orders in advance for new products, as the focus is specifically on the product and the people attending have signalled their interest in the product. Depending on the type of product or service you are marketing and the level of attendee, direct-selling may or may not be appropriate.
- **Media Opportunity:** A launch function provides the opportunity to get the media's undivided attention and for senior spokespersons to have access to a variety of media representatives. It enables you to demonstrate the product, discuss possible angles and it is newsworthy because it is a new product launch.
- **Demonstration:** Like exhibitions and seminars, a formal launch function provides a central place and captive audience to perform product demonstrations. Prospects can handle, test drive, or even take home samples of your new product.

Making It Work

Making your product dazzle and stand out from the crowd is one issue, ensuring effectiveness in communicating brand benefits to the target market is another. Before you start, think about what the overall marketing objectives are for your brand. What are the communication objectives that a launch will help you achieve? Consider the following questions before you begin:

- What do you want your launch to achieve? Increase awareness? Provide product or service information? Sell product? Or something else?
- Do your competitors utilise launch campaigns? If so, analyse their methods, as you would a competitor's advertisement.
- Who are you targeting? New or existing customers, or someone else?
- What are your financial, time and technical constraints?
- What information would your target market find useful to receive as part of the launch campaign?
- Will you be managing, designing and implementing the launch using internal or external resources, or both?
- Will your launch be tied in with a conference, trade show or other industry event?
- Are you doing simultaneous national launches, a combined regional launch, or specific country or city launch?
- Most importantly, who will be handling inquiries from your launch campaign?

Marketing Tools

The following marketing tools should be assessed to determine how they can help meet your overall product or brand launch goals.

Advertising

- Use it to create general awareness.
- Reach new and existing customers and prospects.
- Develop product literature and information sheets outlining benefits to your target market.

Personal Selling

- Utilise sales to give more detailed information, especially for complex or high ticket items.
- Approach existing customers using personal relationships.
- Provide a mechanism for prospective customers to buy.
- Utilise outbound telemarketing to enhance the sales effort.

Direct Marketing

- Provide detailed product information to a wider market.
- Reinforce advertising and personal selling messages.
- Direct invitations to your target market to attend the launch event.
- Provide an alternative mechanism for customers to buy.

Web Marketing

- Educate potential clients by providing detailed product information.
- Provide 24-hour access to your business and product information.
- Reinforce advertising and personal selling messages.
- Provide an invitation mechanism.
- Provide a mechanism for customers to buy.

Exhibitions and Seminars

- Additional educational opportunities provided by a tight forum of interest.
- Provides wide attendance for lead and prospect generation.
- Can gain additional media attention.

Public Relations

- Create wider awareness.
- Build credibility through possible third party endorsement of your products and services. * Reinforce advertising, personal selling, internet marketing and direct marketing messages.

Promotions

- Utilise sales promotions to generate trial of product.
- Promotions can assist in pushing your product on to the shelf or through the distribution channel.
- Promotions can be used to get introductory offers and samples to the market.