

The Communication Process

According to Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, (2011):

“Companies are both senders and recipients of messages. As broadcasters, they seek to inform, persuade and remind the target market to adopt action courses compatible with the need to promote the purchase of products and services. As recipients, companies are attuned to the target market in order to develop the appropriate messages, adapt existing messages and detect new communication opportunities. In this way, marketing communication is a two-way process, rather than a one-way process.

The sender and encoding

The sender is the one that initiates the message in the communication process. In an interpersonal conversation, the Sender can be a parent, friend or salesperson. In the case of advertising or a press release, the Sender is the company or organization itself. For example, the Swedish brand Absolut Vodka launched a marketing campaign with the slogan "In an absolute world". Initially, the goal of the campaign was to increase participation in the crowded and increasingly competitive vodka market in the United States. To attract such a market, Absolut had to differentiate its message from the "rational benefits" (such as better taste or soft feeling) that claimed to have new products in the vodka category. Absolut changed its almost legendary super premium brand strategy, from a printed campaign that matched the iconic shape of its bottle with equally iconic art figures, to a campaign that called for the "emotional benefits" of the brand. Thus Absolut launched a new campaign that uses the phrase "Absolute World" to promote the message that their vodka was the brand to choose if the customer was intelligent, knowledgeable and wanted to challenge the state of affairs by adopting bold and optimistic new perspectives of the World. The new ads claim that Absolut Vodka is a class in

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itself, in a world of its own, an "absolute world". The ad campaign also invites Absolut customers to visualize a world that they find attractive, even one that can be idealized or that is "fantastic".

Coding is the conversion of the sender's ideas and thoughts into a message in the form of words or signals. A basic principle of coding is: what matters is not what the source says, but what the receiver hears. One way to communicate a message that the recipient hears appropriately is to use specific words and images. For example, Absolut marketers codified the message by creating a series of life-size external advertisements, television commercials, wrapped buildings, and other means that imagined an "Absolute World" where factories emit harmless bubbles instead of smoke, ATMs provide "free" money, politicians' noses grow when they lie and people in bars use buttons indicating their marital status and mentality.

Message transmission

The transmission of a message requires a channel, a voice, radio, a newspaper, a computer or some other means of communication. A facial expression or gesture can also serve as channels.

Receiving occurs when the receiver detects the message and enters its frame of reference. In a two-way conversation, such as an argument that a representative makes to a lead, the reception is usually high. In contrast, the desired receivers may or may not detect the message when it is communicated in bulk, as most media is saturated by noise, anything that interferes with, distorts or hinders the transmission of information.

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In some media overloaded with advertisers, such as newspapers and television, the noise level is high, while the reception level is low. For example, ads from competing stations, ads for another entertainment option or other programming on the same network might hinder receiving the "Absolute World" ad campaign message. Transmission can also be hindered due to situational factors: the physical environment such as light, sound, location and climate; the presence of other people or the temporary moods that consumers might have in the situation. Even mass communication cannot reach all the right consumers. Some members of the target audience may have been watching television when Absolut's commercials were broadcast, but others probably weren't.

Receiver and decoding

Companies communicate their messages via a channel to clients or receivers who will decode the message. Decoding is the interpretation of language and symbols sent from the source over a channel. Mutual understanding between two communicators, or a common reference framework, is required to achieve effective communication. Therefore, marketing managers must ensure an adequate consistency between the message that will be communicated and the attitudes and ideas of the target market.

Even if a message has been received, it will not necessarily be decoded, or properly seen or heard, due to selective exposure, distortion and retention. Even when people receive a message, they tend to manipulate, alter and modify it to reflect their prejudices, needs, knowledge and culture.

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For example, differences in age, social class, education, culture and ethnicity can lead to poor communication. Moreover, since people don't always listen or read carefully, they can easily misunderstand what is said or written. In fact, researchers have found that consumers misunderstand a large proportion of printed and televised communications. Bright colors and highlighted graphics have been shown to increase consumers' understanding of marketing communication.

However, even such techniques are not foolproof. A classic example of poor communication occurred when Lever Brothers sent samples of its then-new fret detergent, Sunlight, which contains "real lemon juice." The package clearly stated that Sunlight was a home cleaning product. However, many people saw the word sunlight, the big image of lemons and the phrase "with real lemon juice" and thought the product was lemon juice.

Companies that target consumers in foreign countries should also be concerned about the translation and possible miscommunication of their promotional messages in other cultures. An important issue for global companies is whether to standardize or customize the message for each global market in which they sell. While Absolut markets used the "World" message globally, they customized the ads to reflect how people in various regions could view an "Absolute World." For example, a bus stop booth on Second Avenue in New York was covered to look like the subway entrance, a dream for many New York subway users. In Germany, consumers were given a first-hand experience of the "Absolute World". For a week, a fleet of Porsche taxis passed passengers quickly and for free around Hamburg, Munich and Berlin. By the end of that week, taxis had generated more than 15 million media contacts with television, print media and online news coverage.

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Feedback

In interpersonal communication, a receiver's response to a message is direct feedback to the source. Feedback can be verbal as when saying "I agree," or nonverbal, such as nodding, smiling, frowning or gesticulating.

Because mass communicators like Absolut's often don't receive direct feedback, they should rely on market research or analysis of viewer responses to have indirect feedback.

Absolut could use measurements such as the percentage of viewers who recognized, remembered or claimed to have been exposed to Absolut's messages. Indirect feedback allows mass communicators to decide whether to continue, modify, or discard a message. Websites also facilitate feedback. For example, Absolut could capture consumer feedback on email messages, discussion boards, blogs and other website tools.

REFERENCE:

Lamb, C., Hair, J. and McDaniel, C. (2011). Marketing. Ohio: Cengage Learning.