




What Makes Great Marketing?

Takeaways from the First Annual Warrillow Awards

By John Ellett, CEO, nFusion Group, LLC



Among my sponsorship duties for the first annual Warrillow Best Small Business Marketer of the Year Awards, I co-judged a shortlist of 30 submissions drawn from 74 award entries. These entries came exclusively from large companies that market to small businesses. It was a terrific opportunity to see examples of how great marketing distinguishes itself. In this paper I outline the criteria we used to select the final award nominees and explain how the finalists met these criteria.

Criteria 1: Is the market insight actionable?

Effective campaigns that engage small business decision-makers grow from a smart, actionable insight. A general acknowledgement such as “small business people are busy” creates a generic message and campaign. A good insight, however, might answer such a question as: What really motivates an entrepreneur? Or is there an unmet need that can be addressed or a pain that can be alleviated? How do decision-makers really go about deciding what to buy? Finding a unique, actionable insight that can lead to a competitive advantage is key to building a distinctive program.

Great examples: Intuit understood the yearning to “do my own thing” that’s common among aspiring entrepreneurs. American Express uncovered an issue that inhibited businesses from using credit cards for purchases other than travel, entertainment and small items. FedEx recognized the pride small business owners place in their products and the importance of getting their products to customers as intended. The finalists understood people, not just entities, and that understanding led to actionable insight.

Criteria 2: Is the value proposition compelling?

In order to stand out, marketers can benefit from a value proposition that is compelling to the intended buyer. Companies need to give people a reason to engage with messaging. A value proposition motivates people when it connects with real issues facing a small business person.

Great examples: The more effective programs did the hard work of finding or creating a compelling point of difference. American Express created a flexible Plum card that simulated the trade terms that were normally extended to business buyers for inventory purchases. Intuit offered a free QuickBooks tool for planning a new business, and it offered value to the aspiring entrepreneur. Cisco brought a technology demonstration center to local communities, offering meaningful information for a short-term investment. Great marketers don’t accept the status quo; they change the game.

Criteria 3: Are the communications distinctive?

Getting a message heard in a loud media marketplace takes more than money — it takes communications that stand out in a crowd. The ones that stand out are fresh, bold and engaging. And they reach the small business person in the right way at the right time.

Great examples: Occasionally we would sit up and take notice, as we did when we saw the television commercial from Capital One: This one made us laugh and pay attention. The FedEx “In the Box” campaign brought a smart insight to life through clever direct mail pieces and thoughtful gifts. Intuit’s “Just Start” tapped into the emotional core of people who want to create a business out of their passions. American Express made small business owners feel special in a noticeable way. Covad reached buyers with a brilliantly executed localized campaign in the less-than-glamorous world of search. All of these marketers’ communications were smart, relevant and distinctive.

Criteria 4: Are communications integrated across engagement points?

Reaching small business decision-makers in multiple media with a consistent message can affect small and big budgets alike. Aligning traditional and digital advertising, Web and search activities with channel communications and promotional efforts is a big challenge for most organizations. The best marketers rose to the occasion and separated themselves from the pack.

Great examples: The best programs executed multi-dimensional integrated marketing well. Covad linked its localized search campaign with optimized, localized landing pages. Cisco linked its reseller partner network into the mobile demonstration center recruiting program for an effective pull/push effort. Intuit leveraged user-generated content along with its advertising to bring a terrific promotion to life. American Express cohesively used event sponsorship, advertising, a website and other activities. FedEx extended the general media campaign all the way down to direct mail with a map to the nearest FedEx Kinko's location. Integration is not easy, but it pays off.

Criteria 5: Does the campaign deliver measurable business results?

There is an old saying: "How will you know when you get there if you don't know where you are going?" I was reminded of this during the evaluation process. Great marketing programs start with clear business goals. We evaluated entries on whether they reached these goals. Marketers should use data and feedback loops to connect marketing activities with business results. This takes a desire to learn and improve over time. And making sure the appropriate systems are in place takes discipline. The finalists clearly have this discipline.

Great examples: The best of the best were good at establishing business goals and then measuring how their marketing programs performed in terms of their objectives. Covad clearly met a goal in lowering its cost of acquisition by 30%. The best campaigns involved other departments in getting the information needed to link activities to business results. Whether the goal was getting new cardholders, new subscribers or revenue per marketing dollar spent, the best marketers had the discipline and the systems to learn. This discipline gives the finalists a competitive advantage for future program planning and execution. The businesses that can systematically learn and optimize over time will dramatically improve their odds of winning in today's competitive marketplace.

Summary

Great marketing starts with an actionable insight and turns this insight into a compelling value proposition. An effective campaign is always distinctive, and it hits customers at several engagement points. Finally, a good campaign meets business objectives. Meeting certain goals, after all, is the point of marketing. Being one of the judges of the First Annual Warrillow Awards was a great experience. It was exciting to see how other marketers are using both standard and new industry tools smartly, in order to advance our field.



About the Author

John Ellett is co-founder and chief executive officer of nFusion Group, LLC, a marketing agency that helps companies plan, execute and measure customer engagement programs in today's complex media landscape. John is responsible for building the team and setting the strategic direction for the firm, which has been recognized by *Inc* and *Entrepreneur* magazines as one of the fastest growing companies in the U.S. He also acts as an advisor to clients' executives, helping them develop their strategic visions, refine their business models and prioritize marketing efforts.

From 1987 – 1994 John served in several marketing leadership roles with Dell, including head of its North American marketing organization. During this period, the company's revenue grew from \$69 million to \$3 billion, which firmly placed Dell as a leader in its industry. In 1994, he founded The Ellett Group, a strategic consulting firm. He and his team advised and trained companies, including Fortune 500 companies and venture-backed start-ups, on customer acquisition and retention, channel and product strategy and marketing program implementation.

John is a graduate of Indiana University, where he earned both a BS and an MBA in marketing. He has taught marketing at Indiana University's Graduate School of Business and is a frequent lecturer at several universities. In addition, he is actively involved with the Austin community and local charities. John is on the Executive Advisory Board of the Austin Chapter of the American Marketing Association, is the founder and chair of Austin Helps Honduras and is a founding board member of The First Tee® of Greater Austin.

About nFusion

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