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### The fine art of putting on a “dog and pony” show!

Like many people in our industry, I loved the HBO series, “*Mad Men*.” Though selling advertising for a community paper and a shopper in Pittsburgh was not quite as glamorous as being a high level agency executive in 1960’s Manhattan, I loved watching Don Draper use his creativity and communication skills to win clients for his firm. In my favorite episode, Don and his team pitched the Eastman Kodak Company on a campaign for their new Carousel Slide Projector. To convince Kodak to give them their business, Draper’s team put on a well-planned, well-rehearsed, well-executed formal presentation or in the parlance of a “*Mad Men*,” a “*Dog and Pony Show*.” As a senior member of his agency’s team, Don Draper took the lead on this important presentation. As a senior member of my paper’s management team, I was often called on to take the lead on major account presentations. In the words of Don’s colleague, Roger Sterling, when we wanted to land a major account, I was called upon to, “*be both your dog and your pony!*” In this month’s Link & Learn, I will review one of these presentations and offer some suggestions on “*landing the big ones*.”

One afternoon, I got a call from one of our sales people and her manager. One of her accounts was a Dunkin Donuts franchisee. Most of the Dunkin Donuts shops in our area had closed when Krispy Kreme had attempted to expand to the northeast. When the collapse of Krispy Kreme created a vacuum in the local market, a new Dunkin Donuts master franchiser had bought the rights to the Western Pennsylvania region and was planning a major expansion there. He told his rep that they had formed a committee to plan and manage their regional marketing and advertising. Using her local contact as a referral, she was able to contact the head of this committee to talk to him about our publications. The rep learned that the committee planned to hold a “Media Day” in Pittsburgh in a few weeks. It was at this point that I was called in and we began to plan our strategy.

#### **Failing to plan, is planning to fail**

When I met with the rep and her manager, my first question was, “*What was the realistic potential of the Dunkin Donuts account?*” I did this for two reasons: first I needed to be sure this account was worth mounting a full court press and secondly, I needed this information to secure the resources I would need to mount it. She told me that they were planning to open 28 stores over the next two years. If the average expenditure for each store was \$2500 per annum, this business could amount to more than \$70,000. Armed with this number, I was able to get approval to offer special financial incentives (if necessary) to Dunkin Donuts and to choose the people I needed to help me prepare the presentation.

I then scheduled an initial team meeting with the rep, her manager, our best spec artist, a digital specialist and a person from our research department. The collective knowledge of your people is your company’s most valuable asset. The old adage, “*no one of us is as smart as all of us*,” applies here and the more viewpoints you bring together in the early part of the planning process the better. If you do not have a dedicated research person in your company, you should draw on the services of the CVC Audit and any other sources of information available to you. The best way to describe this first meeting is “*controlled chaos*.” As leader, it is important to let everyone have their say and to solicit their input, but you must keep the team focused on the task at hand.

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The first step is to collect information. Assign members of the team to the following tasks:

- Collect information on the target account. This can be done online using their website, LinkedIn and other resources.
- Try to determine what types of advertising they are doing and what aspect of their business they promote. If they are new to your market, research their marketing in other areas. I have even contacted the sales departments of media outlets in these cities.
- Research the advertising and marketing trends in the target's industry.
- If there is an agency involved, find out as much as you can about their accounts and media buys.
- If the account has locations in the area, visit them and talk to the store managers and personnel to learn about the target's frontline operations.
- At the close of the first meeting, schedule a follow-up meeting where each person will present their findings.

In the second meeting, review the information and begin to develop your "WHAT & WHY" thesis. The entire presentation should be directed toward answering two questions: "WHAT do we offer that none of our competitors offer?" and "WHY should they care?" Your discussion should include:

- Strengths and weakness of your products
- Competitive advantages and disadvantages

The next step is to begin a two pronged planning process. The first consideration is what specifically you are going to propose. Plan an advertising campaign for the client using what you have learned about their business. Write out the plan detailing the logic behind every aspect of the program. Prepare spec ads to present with the program.

Next plan out your strategy for presenting your products. Try to see things from the client's point of view. You want to include:

- A way to set yourself apart from the competition
- Ways to engage the clients full attention to ensure that they are fully engaged with your presentation
- Potential objections to your proposal and ways to counter them
- Evidence which supports your proposal such as market data, testimonials and case studies

Once you have worked out the details of the presentation and decided who will present the materials it is time to rehearse the call. Get someone to act as the customer and roleplay the presentation. Use these practice sessions to refine your presentation. If several people are taking part in the presentation, be sure to practice your timing and "hand-offs." This is time consuming but it will pay big dividends in building your confidence and will ensure that your "dog and pony show" goes off smoothly. Prepare information packages for everyone who will be attending the meeting. (It pays to prepare a few extra packets as you never know who may surprise you and show up to your presentation.)

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### **Its show time folks!**

Your efforts in planning and rehearsing will pay off when it is time to make your presentation to the customer. If you work harder than your competitors before the client meeting, you will put them at a severe disadvantage when the big day comes. The confidence you display will inspire the prospect to have confidence in your publication. There is a danger in being too focused on the plan. You must always listen carefully to the client and stay attuned to their needs and to the signals, verbal and nonverbal, they are sending out during the meeting. If you have an allotted block of time, be sure to leave time for questions at the end. Follow-up after the presentation. Call the person who invited you to present and send out written thank you cards to everyone in attendance. Keep the pressure on until you get the business.

### **War story**

Like all old salespeople, I like to tell “*War Stories*” about the sales calls I’ve made in the past. Here is my war story about the Dunkin Donuts Presentation.

Dunkin Donuts set up a media day on a rainy Wednesday in Pittsburgh. They scheduled half hour blocks of time starting at 8 a.m. for local media outlets. The local dailies, radio stations, TV stations, cable providers and billboard companies were assigned a time and told that the 30 minute time limit would be strictly enforced.

The sales rep, her manager and I showed up 15 minutes early for our 11:30 a.m. slot. This was less than ideal as they would be suffering from information overload after listening to 7 back-to-back presentations, and ready for their lunch. I knew that the afternoon presentations would be somewhat more memorable simply because they would be the last ones seen. This meant that I needed to break the monotony of the day for the committee members and quickly engage their attention. I walked in with a massive salesman’s sample case and set it on the floor next to me. They groaned fearing that it was packed with reams of mind numbing facts about my publications. I started off in a monotone saying, “*I would like to tell you about the Pennysaver’s marketing model...*” I could see their eyes begin to glaze over when I bent over and pulled a box of Dunkin Donuts “Munchkins” from my case, and passing them around the table said, “*We use the Munchkin Marketing Model!*” As they enjoyed the treats, I went on to explain that like these mini donuts, with our targeted publications, each store could reach as few or as many homes as they wanted. This stunt broke the monotony of the day and fully engaged the committee’s minds (as well as their taste buds).

In our planning, we realized that people only frequent donut shops within a few miles of their home or work. Because our publications targeted specific neighborhoods, our ability to blanket the areas around each store was our key competitive advantage. The munchkins provided a perfect, and memorable way to highlight this key point.

We also knew that their agency had a history of using television advertising for their clients. To counter this we talked about the popularity of coupon inserts with consumers and the success Dunkin Donuts franchisees in other markets had with them. Our research in these other markets showed that in addition to promoting their baked goods, their flyers also promoted their coffee products. Our research showed that Pittsburgh was one of the top cities for tea drinking in the US. I asked the store owners on the committee if they found that their stores sold more tea, both hot and cold, than their counterparts in other markets. They said yes and I followed up

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with a recommendation to include a coupon for tea drinkers in their advertising. This accomplished several things, it engaged them in the presentation, demonstrated our thorough knowledge of the local market and got them thinking about using print coupons. I said that I had some other interesting insights into the market which I included in their packets, but since I only had 5 minutes remaining I would answer any questions they might have. Breaking their own rules they kept us there for another 45 minutes, which not only gave us the longest time in front of the advertising committee, but I'm sure it threw off the timing and confidence of the media reps who came in later in the day. During the Q & A period the agency representatives questioned our readership claims. I was prepared for this and responded with third party audit information proving my point.

When the rep followed up with her contact the next morning he told her the committee's decision. They were awarding our publications 100% of their print budget and that they had moved the funds they had earmarked for radio to the print side. In the course of the next year, they invested more than \$100,000 with my company. Between the time of this meeting and my retirement, Dunkin Donuts had spent over \$325,000 in our publications.

### **Dogs and ponies are your friends**

As we all know, the media landscape has changed in the last decade or so. Being human we tend to focus on the negative impact of these changes and often overlook the advantages they can bring. Tightening budgets and a tough competitive landscape environment have led many media buyers to become more flexible and value conscious. Buyers who may not have even considered a shopper or a community paper a few years ago, are willing to look at what we have to offer. Landing these big accounts takes a lot more work than selling the local mom and pop pizza shop, but the potential revenue they can add to our bottom lines makes this extra effort well worthwhile. In addition to the obvious financial advantages of selling these big advertisers, their very presence in our pages adds credibility to our publications and makes it easier to sell more new businesses, large and small. Though we don't have the time to put this much effort into selling every prospect, the thought process learned when planning to sell a major account will influence every call we make. If someone asks if you're ready to sell a major account will answer in real Mad Men (or Women) fashion and say, "I will be both your dog and your pony!"

*This article was written by Jim Busch.*

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