



*Helping Organizations
Take the Next Step*

How to Maintain (and Build) Your Brand in a Weak Economy

By Lisa Toller

Common sense might dictate that organizations reduce expenses – especially discretionary ones like marketing – in an economic downturn, right? Well, at the risk of disappointing every thrifty CEO looking to improve the bottom line, research suggests that not only should you maintain your marketing efforts, you should (dare I say it?) spend more in recessionary times.

According to Harvard Business School professor John Quelch, “It is well documented that brands that increase advertising during a recession, when competitors are cutting back, can improve market share and return on investment at a lower cost than during good economic times.”

Perhaps this phenomenon is due in part to the fact that recessions breed insecurity among consumers, which in turn triggers their desire for familiar, trustworthy brands. It's not a coincidence that many of the world's top 100 brands are over 100 years old. These brands have weathered good times and bad because brand keepers didn't cut and run when the going got tough. As a result of staying the course, enduring brands become more resilient and engender stronger consumer loyalty.

One could argue that recessions are actually a good thing – an opportune time to examine your brand to determine the kind of value you're providing to consumers. What kind of assurances can you make regarding quality that would instill greater confidence in your product or service? The moral support that you provide to consumers now will build solid bonds and could strengthen your brand over the long term.

The best way to thrive in a soft economy is to keep your eye on the goal: A stronger, highly-differentiated brand that delivers great value time and time again. Deliver on that promise and your consumers will be more likely to stick with you now and in the future.

Tips to Turning a Downturn Into an Opportunity

- 1.** Now's the time to negotiate media buys as your competitors cut back on advertising and publishers have more wiggle room.
- 2.** Look for ways to deliver higher value at the same price.
- 3.** Review your marketing message and make sure it is clear, concise and compelling.
- 4.** Keep your finger on the pulse of consumer perception of your brand by conducting surveys.
- 5.** Develop and publish a quality assurance policy to minimize risk for new consumers.

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