



**Lively Solutions to 15  
Marketing Mishaps**

**Industry consultant smashes 15 advertising myths—  
and offers strategies for avoiding these ruts**

**By Howard Whitman**

**D**avid Lively believes you have a great story to tell. The only problem is, you probably aren't telling it.

Lively, a consultant with R&A Marketing who specializes in advertising, marketing and operations for home furnishings businesses, presented his potentially controversial views in "Manage Your Media Mess," a session at the 2007 Myriad Conference in Scottsdale, Ariz.

In his opinion, the main challenge furniture retailers face in getting their message—their story—out to customers is cutting through the "media myths" that can ultimately do more harm than good when you're planning your marketing strategies.

To illustrate, Lively discussed 15 of these myths and offered his take on ways to bypass them and ultimately strengthen your advertising attack. Here they are.

**Myth #1: Demographic data from media reps (ad salespeople, etc.) is unbiased and meaningful to your business.**

"Most media representatives, while being wonderfully nice people, are simply not forthcoming with the data available," Lively commented. "They are expected to, and are driven by, making the sale."

His solution: you should seek out individual household data, which is readily available and affordable for even the smallest businesses, on your own. "These consumers, once identified, can be reached," he said.

**Myth #2: If your combined media reach (print, TV, radio, etc.) is large enough, you're assured of influencing your target.**

Lively's take: "Unfortunately, media dollars don't get spent or delivered in a vacuum. It's not who you reach that matters as much as what you say.

He said, "You have 70 words in a 30-second TV spot to answer this question: Why should Mrs. Jones do business with your company over all the other options she has available in your market?"

"You have

His solution: discover your untold story and hammer it home to convince potential consumers why they should shop with you by using this formula: PE (per-

sonal experience) minus P (price) equals V (value). In other words, the experience of shopping in your store should be so positive that it should supersede price as the main value to consumers—and that's the story you must convey in your ads.

**Myth #3: Your advertising and marketing efforts will always influence consumers.**

The truth according to Lively: "Bad ads will not influence your customer. Bad ads are about the advertiser. A good ad is about the customer. The only job of media is to carry the message. Influence is created by what you say!"

To illustrate this point, he cited a recent ad from Nike commenting on the Don Imus/Rutgers basketball team controversy. The ad thanked "ignorance" for starting the conversation on this topic, drawing attention to the team, reminding people to think before they speak, unintentionally moving women's sports forward, and "for making all of us realize that we still have a long way to go."

The ad said nothing about Nike's products. It didn't even mention the company's name. The only connection to Nike was its logo, which appeared at the bottom of the page. Yet it said a lot about the manufacturer's philosophy and stand on such issues, ultimately drawing positive attention to the company without showing a sneaker.

**Myth #4: A varied media mix will reach people better. For example, you'll benefit when newspaper readers see your ad and hear your radio spot at the same time.**

"In today's fragmented and busy world," Lively commented, "it takes (national-company-level) ad money ... to connect these dots. Independent furniture stores, regardless of market size, should never use more than three media outlets. Our company recommends one or two (at most)."

**Myth #5: You don't need media dominance if you have a good media mix. In other words, diversified marketing is more important than frequency of your advertising efforts.**

"Never believe 'we have reached these people, what we need is to reach more people,'" Lively warned. "People don't stay 'reached' any more than lawns stay mowed.

"You do need media dominance to grow your company," he advised. "The key is relentless repetition and impact. Decide what you have to say. Find a hundred different ways to say it. Say it convincingly. Then say it again."

**Myth #6: Most customers buy based on price.**

To explain his take on this issue, Lively broke up consumers into two types: transactional (like to shop and negotiate) and relational (get attached to one or a few retailers and stick with them). "About 20 percent of the population is relational and won't switch regardless of price," he said. "Roughly 20 percent are transactional and buy almost exclusively



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(based) on price. The battleground is the 60 percent in the middle." That 60 percent, he added, breaks down into two types: transactional but willing to change if your price is competitive and your convenience factor is high, and relational but willing to change quickly if the store fails to provide a great experience. It is those shoppers you want to win over with your combination of value and service.

**Myth #7: Advertising generates revenue and pulls people into the marketplace.**

"The truth is only two percent of the people are in the market for your products," Lively said. "(So you must) convince the other 98 percent to choose you first when they're (in the market for furniture).

"(Advertising) is about convincing a few people 100 percent of the way," he stated. "If they hear your ad one time, they're not convinced. Your impact quotient has to be through the roof! Let the customer connect the dots (of your different approaches and media).

"Web sites are extremely important," he added, "but they need to be customized to your store. If you need to supercharge your business, you need to be able to sell online. Tell consumers why they should do business with you over all of the other options."

**Myth #8: All media will reach all types of buyers.**

Not so, according to Lively, who said "Print advertising is a passive media, while radio and TV are intrusive medias. The eyes can be closed, but the ears hear even during sleep. Print is best used for the two percent already in the market (for furniture). Electronic media are best for the 98 percent you're trying to convince (that you should be their first choice when they decide to enter the market."

**Myth #9: Newspapers reach their entire circulation.**

Lively disagreed, saying "People only read ads for products they're already interested in, such as tires or refrigerators. When using newspapers, always remember (they're) a 52-week 'battle of the deal.'" In other words, your one- or two-run ad is competing against the ones that run every week or every day.

**Myth #10: Radio is most effective when used for short-term advertising.**

Lively cited pros and cons of radio advertising. "While radio can effectively 'whip up a crowd,' because of its intrusive nature, it's quite possible to train the transactional customer, causing the 'wait for the next sale' routine," he said.

His suggestion: "Dominate a station or time of day with frequency, consistency and the right message." For example, he advised buying a minimum of one spot per hour from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. for as many days as possible before your sales event starts.

**Myth #11: Actually two myths in one. First, TV is the ultimate media—if you can choose one media, it should always be TV. Second, TV isn't really right for independent furniture stores.**

"No media is necessarily better than another," Lively stated. "Those people who are telling you the opposite are doing so because their livelihood depends on what they're selling. (On the second point), TV is great for independent business. It might be more difficult to (produce) a TV spot (in comparison with) print or radio, but no one ever said all good things come easy. The truth is, TV for independents is successful through message development and repetition."

**Myth #12: Creative production is the most important part of direct mail advertising.**

Lively believes in the power of direct mail, but feels what it offers is far more important than the presentation. "The fact is, direct mail is the easiest and most cost-effective media you have in your quiver," he said. "You can directly measure the results, and powerful messages are easy to write. Also, never forget 100 percent of direct mail is opened over a trash can—meaning you'd better make the point!"

**Myth #13: You need a large presence in the Yellow Pages under your business type, and display ads in the furniture and mattress sections will be most effective.**

"There is not a single shred of proof this is the case," Lively commented. "The expense wasted in the Yellow Pages can be more effectively used to purchase additional long- and short-term advertising that's measurable and will grow your topline sales."

**Myth #14: Billboards can't convey a message.**

Lively felt billboards can have impact when you "use eight words or less to say whatever it is you need said. Billboards are the most cost-effective advertising available if your message is short and powerful."

**Myth #15: The Web isn't essential because it isn't for selling merchandise—it's for information only.**

"This is simply a lie," Lively said. "Don't believe it." His advice for businesses that don't already have their own customized Web sites was to create one ASAP. He invited attendees at the session to e-mail him at david@ramarketing.com for a list of 20 of his picks of the industry's best retail sites. **HFB**