

# EXPERT TIPS ON MARKETING

From selecting the right colors for your brochure to following up on the original message, experts share their tips for achieving the most effective marketing.

By Laura Stepanek, SDM Editor

A majority of electronic security companies has fewer than five employees – the reason that most of you wear a dozen “hats” in the course of a week. And, whether you know it or not, marketing is one of them. If you don’t think your company is big enough to professionally market its products and services, think again.

Even yard signs and van lettering are a form of marketing. If marketing falls under your purview, then you need to think about how these simple messages are perceived by potential customers. Some marketing is basic common sense, but you can craft and deliver your company’s message at any level with the proper knowledge and resources.

SDM asked the experts – marketing specialists at some of the industry’s largest firms – to share their expertise in marketing security to consumers. Here’s what they had to say about everything from creating the message to delivering what you promise.

## CREATING A COMPELLING MESSAGE

Get as much input from as many people who represent your target as possible. Then go to work. And always ask for first impressions from others on what you come up with. – *Mary Lynn Moriarity, Guardian Protection Services Inc., Pittsburgh, Pa.*



Mary Lynn Moriarity

We look for absolute statements that, when heard or read, create a strong emotional impact for the target demographic and psychographics. Remember that sheer demographics are not enough. The electronic security markets are too tightly woven. You need to look further into the psychographics. There’s where the markets live, in the minds of your targeted consumers. Craft the message to what the psychographics dictate. Stay away from the tired old clichés the industry has been noted for. And remember that your customers are seeing this industry for the first time! Get too “techy” or use the standard industry veteran lingo and you’ve lost them. Speak the lingo to your industry peers, but put it in plain terms to your prospective customers. – *David Merriek, Vector Security Inc., Philadelphia*

Consistency is and has been the key to our success in creating a compelling message. We did not want to be like the “norm,” a packaged, one-size-fits-all security provider. We wanted to be known as one of the best, with the reputation for offering the highest quality of installation and service and backing it up with an endless supply of personalized customer service. We have taken a “higher road,” want-





ing our client base and potential clients not to be scared into purchasing an alarm system, but to benefit from it. Feeling secure, knowing that the system is reliable, functional, and will perform when needed – this has been our message. Quality, longevity, and performance; one of our service mark phrases is “Be sure, be secure.” – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc., Overland Park, Kansas*

**GETTING YOUR MESSAGE NOTICED**

Ask yourself, “Would that catch my attention?” I believe you have between 5 and 10 seconds to capture attention initially. Be tough on your own work and try to see it through others’ eyes. Be sure to visualize as much as possible the setting in which the prospect will see or hear your message. When we are required to place a flyer inside a folder, along with [material from] vendors from other industries, we make the flyer a little bigger than standard, or work carefully with the space across the very top so that it can possibly stand out from the rest. – *Mary Lynn Moriarity, Guardian Protection Services Inc.*

Over my 16 years with the company that has been the most challenging, especially on a limited budget. In the early years when it was just two of [us] we did a lot more face-to-face networking. Now today, we also have a stockpile of marketing weapons working for us. One is the techs and their vehicles. A van is a moving billboard. We added our web site to the vans and our web site traffic increased. Our web site is also a huge success. – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc.*



John Erickson

Creating a sustained advertising campaign will help get you there, but only a sustained public relations effort will keep you there. Our industry is best positioned when it can become ingrained within the community it serves. You do that by sup-

porting a cause. We think a public safety cause is best, simply because it ties directly into your business, but there are other ideas. Get in front of your local TV stations, and convince them that you are their information point on safety and security. When something newsworthy happens, call them and indicate how you could help deliver their story to their viewers. Some support a cause with a high emotional trigger to it. That’s a good direction too, because those who share your interest in that cause are making decisions based on emotion, and that’s the kind of person you want to remember your name. And the key to this business is linking your name to a need. You may be unable to sell a basic alarm system to a person who just doesn’t feel the need, but when that need comes, the checkbook will open up a lot wider. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**EFFECTIVE COLORS AND DESIGN**

We use our red shield on everything we can. It may seem simple, but it seems to be working. We have many clients and potential clients remarking where or how often they see the red sign or shield. The red with white lettering is a good choice of colors also because a lot of people associate it with “stop” or “warning,” so we have benefit from the subconscious training them what red and white signs are. – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc.*

Don’t be married to your company colors! Do some research on color and how it affects different genders and age groups. You can make a greater impact if you use that knowledge. Think about your target, too. For instance you’d want to be cautious with type sizes and typefaces if you are targeting the sen-



David Merrick



**Sometimes the Medium is the Message**

**On seasonal marketing...**There's a message for every season, but be aware that holiday season rates go sky high. In the spring you have builder shows and spring clean-up, in the summer you have vacations, in the fall the days become shorter and October is Fire Prevention Month, and in the winter you have holiday robberies, burglaries and additional fire/carbon monoxide triggers. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**On print campaigns...**We have and do a monthly ad in *NEW HOMES JOURNAL*. This year they also asked us if we would like to write an article each month of something that might be of interest to a new home buyer, so we have had some additional success with the articles in the print. – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc.*

**On e-mail campaigns...**Before 2002 they were great. Today they are just a consumer nuisance. Plus, most SPAM programs kill them before they reach... too bad, I liked them. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**On radio campaigns...**Radio has its markets, but the electronic security industry isn't one. In my opinion, radio produces the lowest response for a variety of reasons, including the uncontrolled proliferation of radio stations, and the large segmenting of listeners. In the "old days" radio stations were mainstream marketers, but today every type of listener has their own station. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**On billboards...**In my opinion, billboards are the best medium for the electronic security industry, as long as

you're following these directions: Pick only the spots where driver traffic represents the highest possible concentration of your psychographics. Refrain from the major interstates, unless you place the ad in a pocket leading to a major shopping center, etc. Watch high traffic or "under construction" locations where drivers need to focus their eyes on the road instead of the surroundings. Do not change locations quickly (two months or more time before you move). Tailor the message to the driving public; a few words will do it – they don't have time to read more – and take the 48-foot boards, not the 12 foot posters. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**On Web sites...**You've got to spend money to get your prospects there. I don't think that the alarm industry will ever have the web-marketing prowess of an LL Bean. Overall, our business is a highly personal business. If we lose that, especially if the mistake is consciously made by the industry, it will further reduce our services to a commodity level. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

We have built and designed our own web site from the ground up. It is our pride and joy. I feel it is the single most important piece of marketing a company can have. We put more effort, money, and energy into it than anything else. It helps us – potential clients, existing clients, and even the media have used the site and we have received exposure from that. – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc.*

ior citizen or elderly population. – *Mary Lynn Moriarity, Guardian Protection Services Inc.*

**The one thing we strive for** is consistency. Use a color scheme, logo or message that is presented over and over again. If you think you need a new look and identity, retain the good things about what you already have in whatever form the new look will have. Copy the Mercedes Benz example. No matter how much they have changed their car's appearance over the past 30 years, the distinctive front grill and logo still remains. They want that grill to be seen by oncoming drivers, pedestrians, and anyone else on the road. It's their motorized billboard. We have one too – it's called a yard sign – and it's the industry's most powerful marketing tool. Master its use first, before you tackle anything else. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

link between them. Then use a photo service like PhotoDisc.com for the rest. You'll spend thousands of dollars needlessly to create photos that you can get from a service for under \$200 each. Their libraries are outstanding, and you can have a photo within hours of looking at it. If your campaign is based upon customer experiences, shoot your best customers in terms of story and appearance. Remember that a summer picture used in winter will look ridiculous, so stay away from anything that is blatantly seasonal, and also that your images need to fit your market. And if your market is racially and ethnically diversified (as most are today), make certain that you include that factor in your selection of photography. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**TARGETING YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGNS**

**Since the markets** are made up of many small targets, this is your best type. Focus on those who need or will eventually need your services, and



**WHAT TO PHOTOGRAPH?**

**Anything with your yard sign** in the foreground, then your central station. Create a strong



keep pouring the message on. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**We hit realtors, builders, insurance agents, and architects** on an ongoing basis, with fax broadcasts several weeks apart throughout the year. It does seem to have a small success rate. We also have a VIP list of the same individuals that we send a copy of our quarterly newsletter to as well as any other promotions. I have taken a half-dozen builders and cherry picked them out and sent them several gifts with a letter that explains the gift and why we sent it. After the second gift I say in the letter “I will be calling to deliver the third gift.” It works 99 percent of the time and I retain 80 percent of the builders I do this with. – *John Erickson, Atronic Alarms Inc.*

### WHEN AND HOW TO FOLLOW-UP AFTER A MESSAGE IS DELIVERED

**A campaign should be long enough** to have the best results. Never change ideas until the campaign is over, if you’re convinced that the idea was right. Refrain from pulling the plug, because you never know if you’re pulling it right before it begins to work. Most campaigns should last three months at the fewest, and six months is better. You improve your reach and recognition factors immensely after three months. Chart your progress, lead generation, and sales dollars. That begins with the taking of the lead to the sale. Don’t miss a step or you’re not going to have accurate information to judge results. If something does not work, don’t feel discouraged. Keep trying different things until one does... it will! – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

### WHAT QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN AN AGENCY

**For companies like ours,** who provide the creative theme and do most of the writing, we look for an agency that can work with us to turn those ideas into product. Additionally, we look for reasonable fees, on-time delivery and superior design work. For those companies who do not provide their own creative, they need to form a partnership with an agency that can fully understand our business, our customer and our challenges. They won’t at first, because (a) your company will likely be their only electronic security client, and (b) this industry is unlike anything else they’re used to. Once you’ve selected one, let them learn everything they need to know before they produce their first piece of work. Allow their staff to tag along on a few resi-

dential and commercial sales appointments, participate in an installation and spend a day in your central station. After that, they will be in a much better position of relaying important marketing points to the consumers you want them to attract. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.*

**A large agency** may be full of talented people but you will never have access to the talents of their best and brightest if your company is considered “small potatoes” on that agency’s client list. It’s important to find agencies who have talent but that fit the size of your company and its budget. In addition, the security industry product and service is not something everyone can relate to. I look for a genuine interest in understanding the product and service by people at the top in that agency. – *Mary Lynn Moriarity, Guardian Protection Services Inc.*

### DELIVERING WHAT’S PROMISED IN YOUR MESSAGE

**We use a standard internal** communications form when we roll out new programs or campaigns. It always looks the same and it is e-mailed or inter-office mailed to every employee who could possibly be affected. When employees see it they know that it contains information that may affect them in their interactions with prospects and customers. This helps us to achieve our marketing goal as well as to deliver better service to current customers and prospects. – *Mary Lynn Moriarity, Guardian Protection Services Inc.*

**There are five major components** of the service delivery system that your customers need to rely upon. They are: sales, installation, monitoring, billing, and repair service. If any one of these components fails in living up to the expectations raised in your advertising, your campaign will most likely also fail. In addition, it’s twice as hard to make amends on a broken promise and restore your company’s reputation. Consistent sales training programs pay off. Remember that this industry reflects a guerilla warfare type sales environment, where house-to-house combat is the norm. It makes no sense to have the best-mechanized armament when your sales team is fighting with sticks and stones. If you are faced with a choice between spending your money on sales training or advertising, pick sales training first. Train the sales reps to deliver the message in the most effective way. If you are spending a ton of money to separate yourself from your competitors because of X, then X should be one of the first things out of your sales reps’ mouths. – *David Merrick, Vector Security Inc.* ■