

## How to Market in Challenging Times

*By Elaine Ralls, Air Marketing*

I don't need to reiterate to anyone that we are in challenging times. That market conditions are tough is not in dispute. The bigger question (or dispute), though, relates to what you're going to do about these adverse market conditions. At the monthly HSMAI luncheon hosted at Xona Resort Suites in February I had the opportunity to speak with marketing managers and company leaders on this very topic.

In my discussion I explained to everyone that the only way to get out of these tough times is to get smart. It is important to think about efficiencies and ROI for all your marketing dollars. So every marketing line item in your annual marketing plan needs to have a corresponding ROI definition attached to it; otherwise it needs to be seriously reconsidered. One way to revisit these programs would be to start by establishing the clear-cut quantifiable objectives for marketing programs. By carefully considering potential return on programs, you will be setting yourself up for measuring effectiveness and improving future performance. That is what being smart is about.

Additionally, it is important to investigate all the new ways to communicate and attract people to your products and service. These difficult times can be an opportunity to reconsider communication methods and mechanisms that were set aside when times were good. I suggest using the personality and brand of your company to create attraction strategies. Here are a couple of specifics in this realm:

**1. The "Core vs. Crust" Concept:** While you are targeting your "crust" prospects, or those who represent your very "best" customers financially, analyze your database to also identify your "core" customers. Your core customers are those who repeatedly spend with you, are loyal and provide your high-margin returns. There will undoubtedly be some diamonds in your backyard if you do that.

**2. Relevant and Preemptive Communication:** Find ways to connect with your customers with relevant and preemptive communications showing that you understand them and know what they would like to experience as they consider your company. The difference here is active (as opposed to passive) communication and using analytics to intuitively understand your customers' needs and offer products and services.

At the end of the day, only measurable and quantifiable marketing programs will help you find your way out of this down market. The foundation of your recovery will be based on the information you have in the form of a rich database. Not only that, but

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also your ability to make use of the information in the database to deliver effective communication. It will be about your being relevant to your customers in ways the customers desire. That is because everyone is reconsidering their relationships—even your customers—and you need to communicate to them why you're still relevant to them.

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Thank you to our sponsor and host property, **Xona Resort Suites** – they wowed us from the welcome mimosas to the wonderful lunch and a dessert to die for. The staff and service were impeccable – making all of our guests feel like VIPs. Their renovations are beautiful. Check the resort out at [www.xonaresort.com](http://www.xonaresort.com). Additional thanks go to Richard Carmer from Picture Phoenix for the photo memories, to Elite Audio Visual for sponsoring our audio visual and to the Chaparral Suites Resort for hosting our NAU student members.

### February Photo Memories



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