

## Dick Maggiore: Get 3M's right to grow business

By [Dick Maggiore Special](#) to The Canton Repository

Posted at 7:46 AM

Start this year off right by fixing your marketing to deliver the advantage your company deserves.

Most of your troubles can be solved by effective marketing. If you're not able to keep customers and find new ones, nothing else matters much.

Let's say you want to reverse your company's stagnant or declining sales trend or break through to a significantly new high. To succeed, you must deliver the right message to the right target.

To be effective in your marketing, you must get the 3M's right: the market, the message and the media.

Don't assume you know your message. Don't assume you know the right media. Don't even assume you know who are your best customers.

It's time to diagnose. We think of it as, "rolling around in the mud of the marketplace." Study all you can about the markets in which you compete — not the market your company is in, but rather, the markets where your company's products are consumed. That is where you find your customers.

For example, if you're a steelmaker's marketer, you're not as much concerned about how to make steel as you are about studying the steel-consuming markets, such as carmakers and steel fabricators — in other words, your customers.

After getting a good dose of the current trends and issues impacting the markets you serve, you're ready to drill down and spend time with your customers and prospects. You want new insights about your customers. Ask a lot of questions. Look and listen with fresh eyes and ears.

Focus groups are ideal for discovering new information. Such research is referred to as qualitative. It's not statistically reliable, but it often is quite revealing and should provide you with insights for further testing.

Remember, you are researching to find an idea about your product or service that is highly valued by your customers and prospects and, at the same time, most different from your competitors.

After you have uncovered a few "aha!" insights, it's time to put them to the test. Ideally, you will discover a few [positioning](#) ideas to test with your customers and prospects using quantitative

research, such as with online or phone surveys. Quantitative research is statistically reliable. Consider working with a research firm.

The more the positioning idea is desired by your customers, the better. The more the idea is different from your competitors, the better. Don't go any further until you have confidence in the differentiated position of your product or service.

That is the fundamental exercise. If you don't get this right, the next two M's — message and media — will be handicapped.

It has become increasingly difficult to find a truly 100% differentiated idea. The goal is to find the best idea you can. It won't necessarily be perfect. That's OK.

It's helpful to keep in mind the advice from Harvard Business School guru Michael Porter, "The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do."

Have you found your strategic differentiating idea, your unique position in the market?

If so, you've done the most critical "M," getting the market strategy right.

You are now ready to move on to the message. The positioning idea is strategic. The job of the message is to dramatize the strategic positioning idea into the minds of your customers and prospects. It's dramativity time.

Be bold. Be courageous. Planting your message into your customers' and prospects' minds is the goal. Having the right strategic idea will help get it into the mind because it is meaningful and relevant with your customers and different from what your competition offers.

Breaking through all the clutter will require effort. Thousands of competing messages bombard your customers every day. Your message must be tethered to the strategic position and at the same time be unexpected and memorable.

Getting the right message takes just as much expertise as finding the positioning strategy, but it uses a different skill set. Consider working with a creative firm.

With your market strategy and message in place, it's time to move on to the final "M," finding the right media to deliver your message to your customers and prospects.

Do you go with online media and micro target? Do you go with traditional media and mass market?

A funnel analogy is often used to describe where the customer is in the sales journey. The top of the funnel is wide and is more associated with mass marketing. The bottom of the funnel is narrow and is more associated with micro targeting. There's a lot of gray in between.

We're running out of space, so we'll jump to the answer. It's about 50/50. Roughly, half your media budget should be allocated offline and half online.

Online tends to work better with existing customers. Offline works better with targeting new customers. Online is better at targeting more granular segments and immediate buying. Offline is

better at targeting the category, conveying emotion, creating interest, building the brand and feeding the bottom of the funnel.

Investing in the right mix of media platforms can increase your ROI. But the world of media is so complex that many marketers simply cannot know enough about each of them to make the right choices.

To be sure you are making good choices, consider working with the experts at a media-buying firm. The best ones are media-neutral. They will recommend a mix of media based on their ability to deliver your message to the right people to generate actions that will maximize your ROI.

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of [Innis Maggiore](#) founded in Canton in 1974, and today recognized as America's leading positioning ad agency helping brands compete and win in the marketplace here and across the country.*