



## Recession-Proof Marketing: From Cutting to Growing Your Budget in a Down Economy

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Saving your budget (and keeping your team employed) in a down economy really boils down to one word: profit. If you're not making money, you're losing money—and that's never good for business.

Just the other day I was on a plane to Vegas to meet with some partners, and aboard the flight were two teams of "axe men" going to shut down and slash their company's regional offices in that area. These guys were a far cry from George Clooney's character in *Up in the Air*, but the results were going to be the same: lost jobs, possible foreclosures, not-sufficient-funds (NSF) checks, uncertainty, and more.

The bottom line is the bottom line, and that's how it always will be. So it's our job as marketing executives to protect the company, our department, and our teams and their families by thinking smarter, acting faster, and generating revenue for the company when it's needed most.

And when it comes to profit, ROI (return on investment) is everything.

### ROI is boss

Look at the line items of your marketing budget daily, and constantly measure the results of each channel or tool in your marketing mix.

If print accounts for 80% of your bottom line and you haven't made major adjustments, you're probably in trouble. Consider rethinking your media buys in print and leveraging Web placement and search-engine optimization (SEO) efforts. Those tactics can be tracked with almost pinpoint accuracy and deployed with far less commissions, creative cost, or long-term buys three months prior to the ad drop (as with a lot of monthly publications).

We have moved our mix from 80% monthly publications (Smithsonian, Time, etc.) to 40% while increasing our SEO, Web, and weekly placements to 60% of our mix. We are able to show tangible results weekly and place ads that are timely to the market—not three months behind.

### ROI is king

Your company is in business to do two things: provide a product or service to an audience, and make money (and probably not in that order).

The further away any team gets from adding value to the bottom line, the greater risk it runs of being downsized. Value is the key. The more value, profit, benefit, confidence, hope, joy, and strength that you and your team bring to the table, the better.

When you're at lunch, make sure to speak with your peers about how their department is doing and help them talk about their frustrations if they'd like to. Offer ideas if you have any; and, by all means,

offer to help or listen anytime they want. Share thoughts about what your department is doing (Hint: If it's working, don't brag!) or what you plan to do and why.

Not only will your peers think about what you are doing to improve profit, but they also may take your ideas back to their team or the board.

### **ROI rules**

The departments that make money for the company in a down economy are far less likely to suffer cuts than other, less-productive teams. They rule because they deliver. But there are rules.

Advertising and marketing departments tend to be more creative than analytical. Depending on its size, a marketing team can have both characteristics; if small or midsize companies are to be effective, the VP or directors will need to focus on financials and develop a plan with the rest of the team.

And that is key: Involvement breeds commitment, so don't be afraid of involving the right team members even if you might typically not involve them in planning. It's a great time to grow closer as a team, and definitely a time to get all the smart thinking possible—each team member's area of expertise—onto paper.

### **ROI serves**

It's important to remind big shots that although they have bragging rights for getting results when results are most needed, humility is a good rule of thumb. Recessions and cutbacks put pressure on and can increase tension among colleagues—from C-level executives to the maintenance crew. If you get too big for your britches, even though you are getting results you're not leading well.

Great leaders get results, but they share the results and help others discover how to get results, too. You don't want backstabbing, and you certainly don't want polarization, which would isolate your team from the rest of the company.

### **ROI celebrates**

Celebration has helped prisoners of war keep hope alive. It brings families together, keeps love alive, and brings joy in times of sorrow.

The current economic climate is challenging, sure, but it's important to remember that whether the bottom line is what you want it to be or you're heading in that direction and working your butts off getting there, celebrate. Celebrate the big, celebrate the small. Celebrate the birthdays, and lift up the smallest of efforts if it improves profitability, motivates the team, or brings the team together.

It's easy to forget to celebrate when you're working in survival mode or simply trying to slow the bleeding. And although those might be reasonable excuses, there is really no reason not to celebrate, smile, and help your team stay focused on what can be done as you lock arms and walk toward the sunrise ahead.