

Combining the power of brand, response AlloyRed's Rosen says few firms do it right



By Carol Krol

Richard Rosen, president-CEO of ad agency AlloyRed in Portland, Ore., received the Direct Marketing Association's first-ever B-to-B Marketer of the Year Award at the Direct Marketing to Business conference in Orlando, Fla., in March.

Rosen founded Rosen/Brown Direct, now AlloyRed, in 1990, after holding marketing positions at General Electric Co. and Lanier Business Products. His agency has won 28 DMA International Echo Awards.

BtoB recently spoke to Rosen about direct marketing, his combined approach to advertising using both branding and response advertising, and the importance of the creative in direct response advertising.

BtoB: *Your agency is known for helping clients marry brand advertising with direct response advertising. What is the benefit of each kind of advertising in selling products in the b-to-b environment?*



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Rosen: AlloyRed's whole premise is based on the combination of brand and direct, so I don't believe there is benefit in separating them. There is marginal benefit, but only companies with money to burn can even think about the separation of these two disciplines.

Strictly brand advertising is often beautiful creative work, but the impact is difficult if not impossible to measure. Direct marketing on it's own can't hope to achieve everything that's possible.

BtoB: *Do you think marketers understand the importance of combining branding with direct response?*

Rosen: I believe they have gotten to the point where everyone is paying lip service to it, but not that many marketers truly understand the power of combining both disciplines. Many believe they are mutually exclusive.

In my entire career, I have found that most companies haven't taken the time and energy needed to create and communicate their company's brand. In fact, in some cases I've found that the "brand" resides only with the creative director and his or her interpretation of the brand through graphics.

Most companies believe that the word, "direct" is "mail," and this couldn't be further from the truth. If this is how most marketers think, then I truly believe there's a problem.

BtoB: *Are there marketers who are actually doing that successfully right now, or are we still in the theory stage? Who is getting it wrong?*

Rosen: A few astute direct marketers have understood the client's brand and have been doing this for years. So we are definitely not in the theory stage.

There's attention being paid to the possibilities of combining direct with the brand, but few, if any, can get it together effectively. Many traditional advertising agencies thought that purchasing a direct marketing agency or bringing in direct marketing talent would get them what they wanted, but they didn't know how to fully integrate it.

Frankly, direct marketing is thought of by some as a necessary evil. I'm hearing that many don't believe it is as sexy or as impactful as general advertising, and they are flat out wrong and missing the boat on what true revenues can be. Most agencies and companies are die-hards, so, with due respect, they are not doing it as well as they could be.

BtoB: *What is the most important thing a b-to-b marketer can do in terms of marketing in order to increase sales right now? What is the most important long-term strategy?*

Rosen: Think about one-to-one marketing. Get to your target audience as quickly as possible with a message that will resonate – once you fully understand a prospect's possible objections – then nurture the prospect through the sales cycle. Too many marketers want "A" leads for their sales force and allow the "B" and "C" leads to be discarded. The "Bs" and "Cs" may just not be ready to buy now, but you must stay in contact with them in respectful, timely communications until they are ready to buy.

BtoB: *Why are direct response and direct marketing important to the equation?*

Rosen: Companies are in business to make money, and to make money you need sales, no matter what business you're in. Getting to your prospects and existing customers as quickly and effectively as possible is the most prudent thing you can do, which is what direct marketing is all about. However, many direct marketers haven't understood the importance of great creative and design. It's about taking the best of the brand-builders and the best of direct marketing via all media, understanding the sales cycle, and using the logic and reasoning of finance as a weapon to drive your entire communications program to put your competitor out of business.

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