

Contributed by Jim Montgomery

BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE LIFE-SCIENCES MARKETPLACE



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Open the latest issue of *Science* or *Biotechniques*, and browse through the ads. But be forewarned; it's not pretty.

First, there are the companies that clearly aspire to be marketers, all of them struggling to outdo the others in "cutting through the clutter." Some of these ads are attractive, colorful, or fun. A few even work well as effective communications. But most are just adding to the clutter.

Then there are the technoids, the all-we-need-is-a-spec-sheet folks. They'll tell you all that matters are the facts; that people who really need a FTIR (Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy) or hot new chemistry kits are plenty smart enough to get everything they need to know from a few — or more likely, way too many — declarative sentences written in high-scientific idiom. More clutter.

Fortunately, there actually is a way to get your message heard and to motivate even the most skeptical of scientists to take some action in the direction of your product. Surprisingly enough, it's not based on the latest and greatest branding buzz-speak, but on a few commonsense principles. We've learned these principles over the years, collectively and individually — usually the hard way.

COMMONSENSE PRINCIPLE NO. 1:

First things first.

Socrates said it best: "Pants first, then shoes." Before you try to figure out how to deliver your message, make sure you know precisely what you intend to say and that it will resonate with the customer. This is where the heavy lifting comes in.

COMMONSENSE PRINCIPLE NO. 2:

What's in it for me?

The only thing a life scientist really wants from your communication is a quick answer to that simple question. If you can't answer it with a headline and a single visual, you shouldn't be advertising; you should be developing your message — or maybe even developing your product. (See No. 1 above.)

COMMONSENSE PRINCIPLE NO. 3:

You care a lot more about your ad, or brochure, or Website than your customer.

Just because your readers are smart people, don't overestimate their attention span or their readiness and willingness to be engaged. Make your point directly and simply. Sure, you need to grab the reader's interest, but don't let creativity get in the way of what you're trying to say.

This can be excruciatingly difficult, especially for technically minded product and marketing managers ... and for talented copywriters.

COMMONSENSE PRINCIPLE NO. 4:

Just because they're skeptical doesn't mean they won't listen.

They will, if you can show them how your product helps to solve a real problem they're having. But note the emphasis on "show," not "tell." Whatever you say, be ready to prove it.

COMMONSENSE PRINCIPLE NO. 5:

It pays to look your best.

Visually, there are two ways to stand out from the clutter; one is to look better than everyone else. Let your message and your company identity determine the look and feel of your communications. Two, invest in a consistent graphic identity, and once you've got something good, stick with it. Your customers will recognize you for it.

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