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Avoid 'clunkers' in your public relations program

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I was excited when I first heard about the government's 'Cash for Clunkers' program. Then I learned they wouldn't accept my mother-in-law.

Since the dust has settled, it appears the CARS (Car Allowance Rebate System) program that ended in August was a huge success. Nearly 700,000 gas guzzlers were taken off the roads, replaced by more fuel efficient vehicles. Very good for the environment. Rebates were awarded to new car buyers valued at \$3 billion provided by Congress.

The program was very good for the auto industry, parts makers, auto dealers, salvage yards, and newspapers and broadcast outlets that carried the ads. The Clunkers program did a bit to stabilize the unemployment rate which stood at historic highs.

The program also gave the Obama Administration a much-needed public relations boost, coming on the heels of several high-level nominees, appointments and programs that made the President's approval ratings drop dramatically.

I was thinking: Someone in the Administration got the PR aspects of the program right. Probably people PR/marketing smarts who were able to put all the pieces together and roll out a program that was catchy, fairly easy to understand, and left people with a good feeling.

Below are some ways that businesses can improve their public relations, expand their customer base, improve their image - and boost the bottom line. (Where appropriate, I've referred to aspects of the Clunkers program as examples. You can insert your own product or service):

*Emphasize benefits rather than products. The Administration sold the customer on cash in your pocket, jobs for the auto industry, cleaning up the environment.

*Track results. Track sales, attendance, etc., generated via various campaigns/programs. When Congress saw the success, they expanded the program by another \$1 billion - and are considering expanding it to appliances.

*Keep a consistent message. Prospects need to register your product/service/brand/name at least 7 times before they decide to act.

*Target current customers. Give them a reason to do business with you again!

*Don't give up too soon on your campaign.

*Choose the right media. Determine what your targeted customers read, watch.

*Don't choose a Clunker as your PR advisor. He/she should have hands-on experience, a proven track record, and good referrals. Choose someone who offers integrity, dependability and a keen sense of humor. Of course, that choice should be someone like me.

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