

# IDEAS AT WORK

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## How to Align Your Editorial and Marketing Messages

### Takeaways

- Editorial and promotional messages are two sides of the marketing coin
- Successful strategies align these messages on both goals and timelines
- Find a balance between the two types that fits your unique circumstances

Playing football in college and the NFL, I saw firsthand how one play sets up another. The run on first down opens up the pass on the next play. A big passing play opens up the running game. A big play threat on one side of the field creates space on the opposite side. It's not about just doing one thing; it's about doing multiple things, and how those things work together.

It may be a little different in business, since there's no defense trying to physically tackle you to the ground, but I've seen the success that can come from lining things up in the right way. You have to know what action to take, and when to take it. Is a potential partner at a point where they need the push to make a decision one way or the other, or do they still need time to get to know you better first? Depending on which situation it is, your approach to your next interaction will be very different.

Marketing messages are a big part of that. This article shows how there are different types of messages that all fall under "marketing" – and while they are different in many ways, they are all driving toward growing your business. It's up to us to know the right message for the right time and place. Read on!



*For Tarkenton*

## How to Align Your Editorial and Marketing Messages

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Sales growth is the lifeblood of virtually every company. But no one likes being “sold to.” So how do you achieve reliable, robust growth without turning off your current and prospective customers?

It all comes down to messaging. Get it right, and clients flock to your door; get it wrong, and your team is left grappling with frustration and disappointment.

A prime example of messaging gone wrong is depicted in the movie “A Christmas Story.” Early in the film, the main character Ralphie is obsessed with the Little Orphan Annie radio drama and deciphering a secret message that can only be understood with an exclusive Little Orphan Annie decoder ring. He loves this brand!

When the ring finally arrives in the mail, he enthusiastically puts it to use – but when he finally decodes the “important message,” it simply reads, “Be sure to drink your Ovaltine.”

“Ovaltine? A crummy commercial?” he moans. We never hear about the decoder ring or Little Orphan Annie again.

That sense of disappointment and betrayal stems from messaging malpractice. The good news is that you can avoid it.

### The Two Sides of the Marketing Coin

At its core, your company’s messaging is a blend of “editorial” and “promotional.” Editorial messaging delivers educational, value-added content, aiming to build brand awareness and trust by offering valuable insights from a credible source. It is reliable, unhurried, and helpful. It brings a lot of value, including brand awareness to the market, SEO value to your website, and top-of-mind stickiness to prospects. However, its focus on the long term can make it difficult to measure direct correlations with sales, even when it clearly plays a part.

On the other hand, promotional content’s objective is more near-term conversion. Promotional messaging emphasizes persuasion over education. It typically has clear, direct calls to action to drive sales, calls, visits, or whatever other action you’re looking for. This messaging is much easier to measure, since it is action-oriented rather than information-oriented, and is valuable for taking someone over the final hurdle to a sale.

It's important to remember that both of these categories of messages, however, are part of marketing. It's a common error to refer to or think of promotional messages as "marketing" and editorial or educational messages as something else. The reality is they are two sides of the same marketing coin.

## A Consistent Foundation

To maximize the impact of your messaging and avoid alienating potential clients, it is crucial that editorial and promotional communications are aligned and coordinated.

The first key is maintaining a consistent brand identity and brand voice, so that consumers recognize your voice each time they encounter your brand. While editorial and promotional messages may vary slightly in tone, they should share the same overarching personality. In other words, if your brand is direct, bold and irreverent, that tone should come through in all your messaging. Conversely, if your company's style is more reserved, formal and technical, this should also be evident in both your editorial and your marketing content.

One of the first tools we develop with new clients is a brand guide, including voice and tone guidelines. This guide is essential to achieving a consistent voice across all messaging. It addresses the words you use to describe the company and your products and services, a description of your brand, and how you wish to be perceived.

## Coordinated Messaging

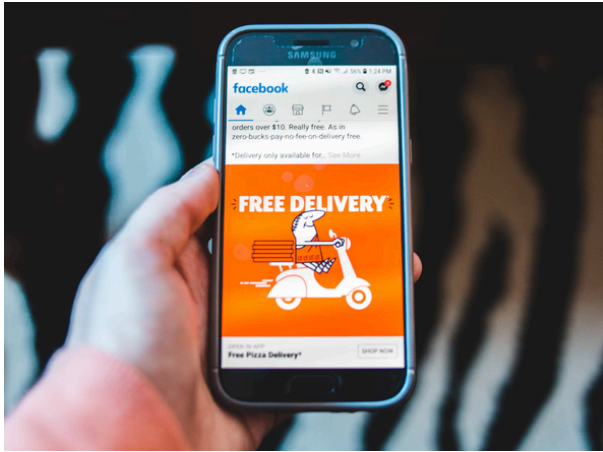
Once you've figured out a consistent voice, your messaging becomes exponentially more effective when your teams work collaboratively toward shared sales schedules and goals. In some companies, a single person or team handles both editorial and promotional messaging, while in others, these functions may be managed by separate, isolated groups. To align these groups and their messaging, it's important to view them as complementary rather than competitive. Each type of messaging should support and enhance the other.



Identify ways for the editorial team to subtly integrate promotional elements into educational content, paving the way for marketing to facilitate sales. For instance, if your sales team is focusing on a specific product, service, or package, ensure that the editorial team is building content that aligns with that focus. Likewise, promotional messaging that is closer to the sale can support the editorial side by providing insights on customer questions and concerns. What are the primary obstacles to closing the sale? Where do prospects need a clearer understanding of the pros and cons of a particular technology? Answers to these questions can provide valuable direction to your editorial team to provide the right messages up front and ease the way for sales down the road.

In addition to coordinating the topics covered in both your marketing and editorial communications, it is important to coordinate the timing. We recommend creating a master content schedule to ensure that your editorial and promotional messages reinforce each other at the appropriate moments. Additionally, consider integrating the sales cycle into your editorial schedule. For instance, if your B2B sales cycle is 9 months long, your editorial plan should mirror this timeline. While adjusting your editorial focus month by month might seem acceptable in isolation, a cohesive content strategy that aligns with the full length of the sales cycle will more effectively support sales efforts.

## Finding the Right Balance



A successful strategy will find the right balance between editorial and promotional messaging. The longer your sales cycle, the more editorial messaging you may need. Launching a new brand? You'll want more editorial messaging. On the flip side, if you're building buzz around the launch of a new product, you may want to up the proportion of promotional content. Want to re-engage dormant customers that have gone cold? Promotional content may be what they need to warm back up to your brand.

Consider each piece of messaging you produce, and pay attention to its primary purpose. While an editorial piece may include some promotional aspects, and a promotional piece may have some editorial aspects, they will typically lean one way or the other. All editorial with no promotion will build all kinds of awareness, but fall short of sales. All promotional with no editorial will mean your messages are essentially cold calls.

For baseball fans, think of it this way: editorial messaging is getting runners on base; promotional messaging is bringing them home. All editorial means the bases are loaded but you're leaving runners stranded. All promotional means you're taking big swings but there's no one on base to score. They work best together, in a proper balance.

## An Editorial Path to Sales

While many companies tend to overvalue promotional messaging due to its direct link to sales, some of the most successful companies rely more on editorial messaging.

Home Depot, for instance, invests significantly in free in-store workshops that teach basic home repair and maintenance skills. This hands-on example of "editorial messaging" focuses on educating and informing, not selling, but attendees come back to the store for the tools and materials they need to do the job.

Similarly, in the digital world, leading SEO service SEMrush offers its free SEMrush Academy, which teaches content marketers how SEO works (as well as how easy the SEMrush platform is to use). You start by wanting to learn how to “do” SEO, and by the end you’re ready to subscribe to their platform.

Every company, large or small, can apply this principle. When editorial content includes a subtle mention of your company name or presents examples that explain how to solve a problem, you are laying the groundwork for future sales.

## 5 Steps to Coordinated Messaging

Rather than competing for resources or respect, editorial and promotional are valuable and essential partners. When messaging from both teams is aligned and leveraged, sales growth soars. To optimize your messaging:

- 1. Maintain your brand personality** across all communications, both editorial and promotional. Use your voice and tone guide to ensure your messaging remains consistent and clear, avoiding any confusion for buyers.
- 2. Audit your existing messaging** to determine whether you have the right balance of editorial and promotional.
- 3. Create an integrated content calendar** that drives both editorial and promotional messaging.
- 4. Determine the length of your sales cycle.** Understanding the average time it takes to close a sale is crucial, so your content calendar can complement rather than conflict with it.
- 5. Recognize the sales potential of editorial messaging.** Even when you provide free, no-commitment content, you’re cultivating future market share.



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