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Budget Season!

The start of Fourth Quarter means it's time for Planning! So many of the people I work with are so busy creating their program or their product they do not take the time to put some strategies in place and plan ahead.

It may seem simplistic, but the easiest way to start is with the calendar. What are things that are coming up that impact your program? That will depend on your program, but for example, if you are producing a movie review program, you might want to do some marketing around Oscar time in late February. Perhaps offer a free Oscar Preview segment of your show to get stations to sample it. A show about Thoroughbred racing might focus on the Triple Crown races and do something around that. It's much easier to think through that plan now than at the last minute.

If your program or product doesn't have a hook that ties into big events, create your own. I was looking for a reason to get prospects' attention a couple of summers ago. I needed a July promotion, but July 4 was not going to work for this product. So, I created a promotion around David Hasselhoff's birthday (July 17-- mark your calendar). Sounds silly, but it had the highest open and conversion rate of any email I did the entire year! Another source of inspiration can be the ebbs and flows of your business. Do you have lots of stations signing on in September? Figure out what that reason is and work with that reason.

Pop culture is commonly used as a tie-in. Whether it is a parody of *Three and a Half Men* or *Game of Thrones*, using pop culture to tie into your show can be very effective and memorable, if done right. The trick is doing it at the right time and for the right reason. Regardless of vehicle, the critical thing is the payoff. If you cannot answer the question "Why", you shouldn't do the promotion.

Once you have an idea that you think works well, you have to decide on how to communicate it. Trade advertising is one way to handle it. Another is the direct approach, either via traditional direct mail or via e-mail marketing. Each has its pluses and minuses, and you need to figure out which works best for you based on your budget, your resources, and your goals.

The multi-level-marketers have a saying: Plan your work, then work your plan. That brings us back to the calendar. Look at the dates you want your events to take place, then work backward from there and create a to-do list that is comfortable for you to work with but leaves enough time for brainstorming your idea and lining up the resources you need, whether that be money, a graphics designer, a direct mail house or a trade publication or conference organizer. Stick to that schedule.

Remember that marketing is ongoing, not an event. Some ideas work better than others. You can never be absolutely sure until the promotion has been executed and you have had a chance to review the results. Starting to plan next year's promotions now will help you get the most out of whatever you do.