

When inflatable pigs fly: Marketing expert shares advice for what works

Collaboration and flexibility help the process

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Dan Wiley has developed a reputation over the course of a long and varied career for his unique marketing techniques. He once erected a 30-foot-tall inflatable pig to draw attention to an event he was promoting.

Now the owner of a public relations and advertising firm in Hollywood, Wiley said all forms of marketing work given the right message and enough time. Nonetheless, there are techniques and strategies businesses can employ to develop ideas, assess how well they work and ultimately achieve success.



Dan Wiley

"If you believe it's possible, nothing can stop you," Wiley said during a presentation in Grand Junction hosted by the Mesa County Women's Network.

Drawing on his own experiences as well as those of others — along with his talents as a comic — Wiley covered a variety of topics and issues during a wide-ranging presentation that lasted two hours.

"Mostly I've learned by screwing stuff up," he joked.

Wiley operates Lone Wolf PR, an advertising and public relations firm that combines his passion for promotions, positioning and media as well as innovative efforts that increase sales.

Wiley once worked for concert promoter Barry Fey in coordinating press conferences and media interviews with such performers as Bruce Springsteen, the Rolling Stones and U2. He later worked for music manager Chuck Norris in promoting such acts as the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Leo Kottke and Lyle Lovett. Wiley subsequently worked at a radio station and advanced from account manager to general manager and vice president.

He went out on his own to start a Colorado-based marketing firm that's worked with such clients as the Denver Broncos, Dreamworks and McDonald's. He launched Lone Wolf PR in 2008.

In developing marketing strategies, Wiley said it's important to first set goals and then come up with ideas for ways in which to achieve those goals. "Begin at the beginning," he said. "What do you want to do?"

A collaborative effort works best, he said: If one person can come up with 10 ideas, then five people can come up with 50 ideas.

Moreover, most people genuinely want to contribute to the success of the businesses at which they work and make a difference, he said.

Wiley suggested an exercise in which

participants propose ideas that are then written down on large sheets of paper posted in a room. Participants then mark the ideas they consider the best.

In going through the process of developing new ideas and concepts, it's important to silence critics, including the inner critics that sometimes inhibit people.

Wiley told the story of Clarence Saunders, a man who was fired from his job at grocery company for suggesting a new concept. Saunders went on to found the Piggly Wiggly chain of self-service stores and change the way people buy groceries.

"Often the revolutionary things start as a grain and they grow into something more substantial," Wiley said.

Wiley also encouraged flexibility and a willingness to accept a different way of doing things. He called the attitude "cheese flexibility," recalling a dinner in which cheddar cheese wasn't available to top chili, but mozzarella cheese was. As it turned out, the mozzarella cheese was delicious.

By remaining flexible enough to try different marketing techniques and determine which ones work best, businesses ultimately will achieve the results they want, he said.

If nothing else, small changes made over time ultimately result in big changes, Wiley said.

He compared the results of incremental change to a 1 percent course correction for a luxury liner crossing an ocean. "Nothing appears to happen. But over time, you end up in a whole different country."

Similarly, businesses that call even 1 percent more people a year ultimately will increase sales, he said.

It's important not only to develop ideas about new ways of doing things, but also to take action and do so with persistence, Wiley said. Quoting Winston Churchill, Wiley said, "Never, never, never, never give up."

In some cases, marketing results in immediate sales. But in other cases, the benefits of marketing don't show up for years, even decades.

It's important as well to firmly believe in a course of action. Quoting Napoleon Hill, Wiley said, "Whatever you mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

Wiley told the story of a farmer who planted bamboo rather than soy beans. For three years, the farmer had no crop. But in the fourth year, his bamboo grew more than 100 feet. It took three years for the bamboo to establish roots to support 100-foot stalks. "He believed it and he achieved it," he said.

Businesses can do the same thing, he added.

