

Case Study: Smart Marcomm Strategy Enables Precision Manufacturer to Nearly Double Sales in One Year  
by **Stephanie G. Hlavin**

In the world of engineers, where numbers and measurable impacts reign supreme, marketing communications may seem like a bunch of mumbo jumbo, a pointless exercise in corporate frivolity. But not to electronics components manufacturer Minco.

Challenged by the company's president to increase sales and the workforce 50% over five years, Minco first invested in marketing communications to spread the vision, increase alignment, and build the brand among employees. Just one year after kicking off the branding and marketing campaign, Minco has grown both sales and the workforce by 43%.

Company: Minco

Company location: Minneapolis, MN

Contacts: Mary Rapaport, Global Marketing Director, Minco; Chris Schermer, Partner and Director of Client Strategy, Schermer Kuehl B2B Marketing Agency

Industry: Manufacturing (B2B)

Annual revenue: \$100 million

Number of Employees: 1,100: 700 in North America, 400 in Asia Pacific

**The Challenge:**

In 2004, Minco was a 30-year-old, \$70 million company with 700 employees. Minco manufactures engineered components used in high-reliability products such as missiles, diagnostic equipment, and pacemakers and other implantable medical devices—all of which must work without fail. In other words, growth absolutely could not come at the expense of quality. Company leaders also realized that industry-standard marketing practices—for example, exhibiting at tradeshow and running ads in trade pubs—would not take Minco where it wanted it to go.

Enter Mary Rapaport. Now global marketing director at Minco, Mary realized her first task would be to rebrand and reposition the company internally. "We needed to preserve all the strengths, history, and uniqueness of the company," says Rapaport, "but develop the right messaging with more sophistication to connect with customers."

That effort had to start first on the inside.

**The Campaign:**

Phase 1: Ask yourself, "Who are we?"

Rather than assume that she and other company leaders knew what the company's core brand message was, Rapaport asked. With the help of their B2B marcomm agency, Schermer Kuehl, they looked deep within the company for the stories of their brand.

"We asked 20 people what we do and got 20 different answers. But when asked what value we bring to our customers, they all said the same thing—it's the relationships with our customers. That's how our company is different."

Phase 2: Determine the strategic vision and core message

Minco had set its strategic vision: Move from an engineering-focused company that asked the customer to figure out how a product could help to a customer-focused company that solved problems with a product that's not just a

component but a solution.

Minco conveyed this vision by showing to customers its products in the component-specification process—that critical moment when design engineers need absolute confidence that every component that goes into their products will function perfectly. This positioning demonstrated to customers and prospects that Minco got it. Rapaport says, "Our products were a critical component of our customers' products' success, and similarly Minco became a critical component of their companies' success."

#### Phase 3: Articulate the strategy and secure internal adoption

In an organization stocked with left-brain thinkers—where "even the sales staff are engineers," she says—Rapaport needed employees to buy into the value of a strong brand and to understand that it's more than a new logo or ad campaign. She also needed to engage the people on the manufacturing floor.

To reach the first group, her team spoke their language and gave them a process methodology for how the rebranding would work. And along with their consensus, came accountability—because they had bought into the idea. For the second group, Rapaport had to find a way to make them feel part of the brand.

It was typical for these 350 floor employees to identify themselves by the products they worked on ("I'm in heaters" or "I'm in sensors"). To encourage them to embrace the larger brand and the company vision, Rapaport knew she needed something pretty exciting. She settled on a movie premiere—a premiere of the brand.

An internal viral marketing campaign got the word out. "We encouraged 12 unofficial company opinion leaders to share an online Flash trailer promoting an upcoming employee event," Rapaport says. Within three days, two-thirds of the company had seen the trailer, and they were asking for more.

When the premiere event arrived, it featured red carpets, 20-foot screens, velvet stanchions, popcorn machines, and three different show times. The movie was a turning point for the company and the culture. Employees walked out understanding that the brand was more than a logo—that it's how business is done, right down to the production floor.

"If we had done the event just for management, we wouldn't have had half the results or commitment. It wasn't for management that we did this; it was for the entire company and for the people putting the products together," says Rapaport.

After the brand's premiere, internal adoption was easy. "In an engineering organization, the tendency is to connect the dots in a linear way," Rapaport says. "But as a marketer, you know the value of exponential input. And you get exponential results."

#### Phase 4: Launch external, vertically integrated marcomm programs

With internal alignment in place, Minco could launch its external marcomm programs and start moving customers through the buying process more efficiently and profitably. Never straying from their core message of "critical components for critical applications," Rapaport and Schermer took an integrated approach that delivered value in all communications.

Research showed that Minco's engineering audience turned to the Web for credible information. Always keeping in mind that the goal was to educate rather than to sell, the marcomm team focused on driving traffic to the Minco site. Key to the team's efforts: Abandoning data sheets and catalogs disguised as collateral. No one wants to be a guinea pig, especially when you're talking about a pacemaker component. Collateral now addresses problems solved, challenges overcome, and how Minco's products are used in critical apps. "We get into the what-if scenarios engineers find themselves in," says Rapaport.

Delivering ad campaigns that established credibility and top-of-mind positioning. By targeting the design-for-manufacturing process, instead of research and development like most competitors do, Minco positioned the company as a resource, as a partner. "We acknowledged that this is a critical moment, when the prototype is

ready but the design doesn't work," says Rapaport. "We tell the customer, 'Talk to us, you don't have to compromise. We'll customize the right component to get your product to market.'"

Following up with integrated DM and email campaigns. Running simultaneously with the critical-moment print campaigns, "Don't compromise"—themed direct mail and email campaigns drove recipients to the Web site. There, using a simple product selection tool, they can receive a free product sample for integration into their prototype. Creating an online community of peers. Again, by knowing that their customers and prospects went to the Web for reliable information, Rapaport created an organic, online engineer-to-engineer community where users can find more information about a solution, idea, or product; interact as a peer group; and ask questions and discuss their design challenges and solutions. The objective? Once people got to the site, they could see how easy it was to do business with us, says Rapaport. "Sure, we make products, but our products are only helpful if they solve the customer's problem. That's what we conveyed—the value we offer."

### **Bottom-Line Results:**

At the end of 2005, Minco had become a \$100 million-a-year company with 1,000 employees (roughly 65% in North America, 35% in Asia/Pacific). So what sparked this 43% year-over-year growth in both revenues and employees? Schermer attributes Minco's success to brand, marketing, and organizational alignment. "When you look at branding, it doesn't necessarily get business," he says, "but it positions you to do business."

Rapaport is less modest. "You don't grow your company big if you're not a great company. You don't reinforce your business with your customers if they don't believe in your position in the market. There's impact from building the brand." Employee base grew by 300 Sales grew by \$300 million Web site traffic increased 134% 2,500 prospects have opted in to receive information from Minco Over \$100,000 saved in support hours (based on online tools usage) Global campaign garnered over a 2.5% aggregated response rate

### **Lessons Learned:**

Minco unearthed its core brand and plans to keep forging ahead. Rapaport says, "We'll look for new ways to do what worked really well, but our central strategy of offering value and positioning ourselves as part of the customers' solution will not change. It's been successful."

### **Related Links:** Minco

Schermer Kuehl—Minco's B2B marketing agency

Minco data sheet disguised as collateral, before their rebranding efforts (PDF)

Creative that mimicked the customer's actual on-the-job discussions and challenges (PDF)

"Don't compromise" customized creative (PDF)

Initial rebranded creative that positioned Minco as a resource and partner for the customer's critical moment (PDF)

Direct mail that drove to the Minco Web site for a free product sample that recipients could design into their prototype (PDF)

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