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Ask Vanessa your marketing question

BRANDING and marketing expert Vanessa Harris will next week start a new question and answer column in the Western Morning News.

Vanessa will be answering readers' questions about everything from starting a business in a recession through to differentiating between logos and brands in a new monthly column.

At a time when many businesses have been forced to cut back on their marketing spend, the column will give readers the chance to get expert advice at no cost.

Anyone with a question about marketing should email vanessa@open.uk.com.



Vanessa is director of Open Brand and Marketing, a Plymouth-based marketing consultancy.

"Many business managers know that companies who maintain strong marketing through a recession emerge at the other end well placed to capitalise on an expanding economy," she said.

"New and innovative marketing activity is, of course, an essential part of any sales programme, After all, the purpose of marketing is to find, attract and keep customers, who are the lifeblood of any business.

"However, successful marketing needs to be developed in a strategic and considered way and not as a knee jerk reaction to poor market conditions. This is particularly important when money is limited.

"So we are seeing an increasing demand for Open to run marketing communication audits in businesses before they embark on a new marketing initiative."

Open recently completed a project with Mount Edgumbe, near Torpoint, an established attraction that needed guidance on how to increase both the total number of visitors to the site and the proportion of visitors who pay to visit the "premium" areas.

An initial audit revealed some message inconsistencies and strategic gaps in the organisation's marketing programme: they were trying to be all things to all men. As a result, both staff and visitors were confused about what the offer was. Investing in a new marketing initiative, such as holding a major concert on site, would have reaped only short-term benefits.

Instead, Open recommended investment in the development of a better offer and refinement of the brand so that everyone understood the organisation's promise. As a result, casual interest has been converted into active participation.

Ian Berry, park manager at Mount Edgumbe, said: "As a result of the work we did with Open, we now have absolute clarity as to what Edgumbe's unique offer is. And the impact of our new positioning goes way beyond our communications programme – it informs everything we do here."

See next week's Western Morning News business pages for Vanessa's first column.