



# Misunderstood Marketing

It's much more than 'sales with brochures'

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There's much discussion these days about sales and marketing alignment, reflecting perhaps the sometimes uneasy relationship that exists between them, particularly in the business-to-business space. Numerous books have been and continue to be written on the "art" of selling, but marketing is a "science," and should be treated as such.

In far too many companies the marketing function has been misunderstood, minimized or marginalized. As a result they cherry pick only pieces of what could be considered a comprehensive marketing program – to the detriment of both their brands and businesses. Unfortunately marketing is often perceived simply as advertising or "sales with brochures." To be sure marketing communications and sales literature are important, but they're only part of a much larger picture.

Over the course of my career in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing, I've identified no fewer than 20 components that comprise a full marketing effort, as well as a "litmus test" for what constitutes marketing and what does not. Ideally, marketing encompasses, in no particular order, merchandising, market research, brand management, channel management, licensing, competitive analysis, product training materials, public relations, design, development and implementation of marketing and business plans, marketing communications, analytics and segmentation, brand architecture, pricing strategies, customer and brand surveys, managing creative agency relationships, special events and product management.

The importance of strategic product management cannot be overstated. Gathering and prioritizing customer requirements are critical to the development of products that are market-relevant. To assure new products are not spawned in an R&D vacuum, marketing must take a leadership role in this process, insisting upon customer-driven innovation rather than innovation for its own sake.

Marketing also plays a central role in product launches, as well as managing the overall product portfolio and life cycles of the individual products that comprise it. This is critical to maximizing the value of those products, achieving the optimal product mix, ensuring strategic alignment with broader business objectives and optimizing resource

allocation. In addition, effective product management includes price and margin controls, product strategies and roadmaps, product demonstrations and training and packaging.

These then are the elements of a complete marketing program, each of which must be addressed to realize its full potential. It should be noted, however, that buying into total rather than piecemeal marketing can lead to misuse and abuse of the function. For example marketing should not be doing employee newsletters, nor should it be going on sales calls. These types of activities distract marketers from their primary mission, and are best handled by others in the organization.

### **The Marketing Litmus Test**

Walking in New York City one day, I was taken by an ad on a bus shelter that used strong, action words to deliver its message. This prompted me to come up with some words (you'll be relieved to know I resisted the temptation to create an acronym) to convey the true essence of marketing and to differentiate it from non-marketing activities.

The result is what I refer to as my marketing litmus test, which includes target, lead, innovate, engage and measure.

Targeting calls for gathering and prioritizing customer needs as noted, but it also requires broader market intelligence to keep from pursuing dead ends and heading in the right direction. Leading means staying in front of the competition by developing innovative products to target-based marketing briefs rather than imitation, me-too offerings.

Innovation is the lifeblood of any business. The most innovative enterprises have overcome the mindset that the customer belongs to sales and product development belongs to engineering. Indeed innovation should be occurring throughout the organization, not just the product development process.

Engagement with customers and prospects is a two-way street that involves not only pushing out information through marketing communications, but listening to and helping them solve their problems. And measurement means benchmarking and tracking metrics for market share, industry trends, pricing, margins and other key data for gauging performance.

If an activity doesn't fall into one of these five areas, it quite simply isn't marketing. The best marketers devote equal time and effort to each of these actions – targeting, leading, innovating, engaging and measuring – for a complete, balanced marketing program. If you've ever had to delay a product launch because the packaging wasn't ready, or had to deal with too much redundancy in your product portfolio because it wasn't being managed, your marketing program was either incomplete, unbalanced or both.

Omitting just one step in this process can result in inefficiencies that adversely impact a company's go-to-market strategy and ultimately its growth. In the final analysis it's all

about knowing what marketing entails and doing it, as well as knowing what it doesn't to avoid distractions from the main event.

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