



STOP SELLING AND START MARKETING!

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The most misused word in business today is marketing. Every conversation, every article, every business conflict seems to include the much maligned word marketing. Most people, however, don't understand it; they confuse selling and promoting with marketing when in fact they are the end results of great marketing, not the sum total of it.

Marketing is a strategic customer focused business philosophy that when done brilliantly makes selling and promoting superfluous. It allows you to clearly understand, and where necessary adjust, your business' position in the marketplace. At its foundation is a deep and intimate awareness of your company, your product offering, your current and potential customers, your industry, your direct and indirect competitors, your stakeholders, the broader community and marketplace, as well as the positive and negative effects these have, and may have, on your industry and company.

All the successful companies I have worked with have understood the importance of knowing what their customers want and how to provide it efficiently and profitably. They have grown by building an inherent company attitude of exceeding their internal and external customers' needs.

Traditionally, marketing is broken down to four key areas of review: Product, Price, Place and Promotion, commonly known as the 4 Ps. Each of these Ps are seen as being an integral part of the whole business picture that when combined provide you with a synergistic business road map.

Product

This is not a mere description of the physicality of what you sell, it is knowledge of what your customer needs or wants your product satisfies. It is a working understanding of what your product's many attributes are and which of these are important to your customer. These include not only the tangibles such as styling and packaging, but also the intangibles of brand, warranty, after sales service, delivery and credit. Your customers see all of these as the totality of your product offering and so must you.

It is also an understanding of which phase your product is in within the product life cycle (research and development, introduction, growth, maturity or decline) and what is likely to happen to it next. Each phase has unique characteristics and requires unique tactics to support and nurture it, with the aim of getting your product into the more profitable maturity phase as quickly as possible and having it stay there for as long as possible.



Price

This is more than just the dollars and cents paid for your product. It is a careful balance of the value that your customer places in your product, the cost of bringing your product to market and the profits you need to make to continue to offer it.

In setting a final asking price, figure out what it costs to produce it, what direct and indirect competitors are selling similar products for, what the marketplace believes an equitable price is, what value the consumer places on the product, the marketplace demand or potential and the maximum charge possible after which there is little or no consumer interest. This range of figures gives you the floor and ceiling prices within which to set your final price.

Place

This is the physical management and distribution of moving your raw materials through manufacturing, through warehousing and distribution into retail outlets and eventually into the consumer's hands. This is equally as important to service providers as it is to physical products.

Issues for a product based company include how much to produce, when to produce, where to produce, what distributors to use and how best to store and move the product around. For a service based company, this can be whether to sell online, the networks you interact with and sell through, how many offices to open and where, how these offices interact with each other, through to whether you franchise or licence your service for others to sell.

Promotion

The most often thought of aspect of marketing really cannot be undertaken until the other three factors of product, price and place have been decided. This is your opportunity to shout from the rooftops what you have to offer.

Promotion can be achieved in five distinct ways: personal selling, advertising, public relations, direct marketing and sales promotions. A great campaign will use a mixture of these promotional tools and it need not be expensive. Forget TV and radio if you can't afford it, think publicity, direct marketing or personal selling, all comparatively low cost and highly effective.

To borrow and mangle an old phrase: 'no company is an island'. Use marketing to better understand your customer, to plan and care for their needs, to better balance their needs with your own desires and to build the perfect product that effortlessly attracts your customers like bees to a hive.