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Rethinking Marketing

By

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Your customer has the power. You do understand that, right?

I'm not talking about "a little bit of power" or even "a lot of power." I'm talking about the entire kit and kaboodle....the whole shebang....the biggest, baddest dog daddy....the whip-me, beat-me, make-me-write-bad-checks power. I'm talking

POWER.

This is *really* important to know and fully grasp in today's world of business and commerce, because for the most part (and I know this is painful to read), your customer doesn't need you. I tell the truth.

This is a seismic shift from the way business used to be done. It wasn't so long ago when the customer didn't have that much power. Information was scarce and customers ill-informed. Marketing was a "blast-from-the-past." And I mean that literally. "Marketing" was a one-way monologue *TO* the customer, a one-size-fits-all mentality by suppliers. Being supply-chain driven was the order of the day. But no more.

You need proof? Okay, take a look at what the New Customer can do:

- Communicate with peers and experts for feedback on products and brands (e.g. listserves, Amazon.com, Epinions.com).
- Get objective information about products and suppliers (e.g. listserves, C|Net, SlashDot).
- Design and configure customized products and offerings (e.g. Dell, Nike.com).
- Use buying agents to pit sellers against each other (e.g. LendingTree.com, Ariba,).

I discussed the reasons behind this change in my September 2004 *Rambling*, *The Death of Float*. Quantum leaps in technology simply switched the power to

the demand-chain side. As a result, the very definition and purpose of marketing has also changed.

In researching my latest book, ***The Most Wanted Marketing Strategy for Exhibitors***, I found a number of definitions. ***Contemporary Marketing Wired*** authors Louis E. Boone and David L. Kurtz gave this one:

"Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, services, organizations, and events to create and maintain relationships that will satisfy individual and organizational objectives."

That is a traditional textbook style definition and was even adapted by the American Marketing Association.

Philip Kotler, noted author and consultant, explains marketing this way:

"Marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make. It is the art of creating genuine customer value."

And Peter Drucker, the godfather of business, has this comment:

"When managers speak of marketing, they usually mean the organized performance of all selling functions. The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself."

I think Kotler and Drucker are a lot closer to defining marketing for today's world, but with all due respect, I believe there is something missing.

Let's first talk about what marketing is not. Marketing is *not* sales and Drucker alludes to that. It's amazing how often managers speak of marketing as the organized performance of all *selling* functions. That is still selling. On the flip side, it's also not unusual for managers to speak of marketing as a function of "image," or "awareness." Marketing is neither of those. Spending money on image or building awareness is God's way of saying you have way too much money. Creating awareness for your products or brand is useless, unless somebody actually buys your stuff. Just like prescription before diagnosis, building image without persuasion is malpractice. You must be able to connect the dots.

Kotler says marketing is the art of creating genuine customer value. That's a great start. And if I could be so brash as to suggest improvement, I'd restate it as, "the art of creating and communicating genuine customer value as the customer defines it."

The key is remembering that the customer defines value, not us. The customer determines whether or not we have created value that is important to them. The single most important thing to remember about any business is that results exist only on the outside. There should only be one focus, one starting point. To paraphrase a famous quote: It's the customer, stupid.

The customer is not interested in what makes our lives easier. The customer isn't interested in what the most efficient way for a supplier to communicate with him or her is. The customer could care less about what you do, why you do it, how you do it, where you do it, who does it, or even when you do it – unless it speaks specifically to their own needs. All the customer is interested in is his or her own values, wants, and reality. A supplier's job isn't to build a better path TO the customer. It's to build a better path FOR the customer. Remember, they've got the power.

Marketing today is much, much more than blasting loud messages to a large group of people (or jamming as many people into a trade show exhibit as possible). Your customer is one person. When he or she has a problem that needs solving, they will look for help. Your marketing should create the bridge that helps them see your products or services as the solution to their problem.

The purpose of marketing is to be on the mind of the prospect when the prospect is ready to buy. When that lightning bolt comes down from the sky, strikes that prospect on the head making them cry, "I need help!" – do they think of you *first*? Do they think of you *second*? Do they think of you **at all**?

About Steve Miller

*Steve is Kelly's Dad, a really good consultant and speaker (just ask Kelly). He also thinks his wife, Kay, is an extremely talented and funny writer (in addition to being **hot**). You can read some of her stuff at KayMiller.net.*

You want innovative strategies, personally attached customers, and insight? Contact Steve. His elite client list (associations & show management companies, and corporations) includes only the most successful and most innovative organizations.

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