

Behind the Counter

A Marketing Viewpoint

I was trying to come up with an interesting topic for the column this week and thought that now would be a perfect time to talk about marketing and marketing techniques that work as well as fail. The reason I came up with this idea is because we are in the middle of the pre-Christmas shopping season which is a season that involves a lot of marketing efforts.

What I have noticed is that the newspapers are now full of flyers and that I come home at night to find a door knob flyer on my front door. There are continuous ads on the radio and TV promoting some sort of product. Storefronts are outdoing each other trying to display something that will attract the public eye. The public appears to be bombarded with all this marketing.

So what makes a marketing program a success? In order to answer that we need to look at what marketing actually is. There are four factors that are required for marketing to happen. The first is that potential purchasers have a need for something. The second is that these purchasers want to fulfill that need. The third is that there is some sort of way for the purchaser to communicate with the seller, such as a face to face meeting in a store. Finally there needs to be a product that can be exchanged.

For example, there might be an advertisement on the radio for some clothing that is on sale at a particular store. I, as the purchaser would hear that ad and decide that I had a need for that kind of clothing and that I would stop by the store to check it out. While at the store, I would look at the clothing and determine if it was what I was looking for – if it fulfilled my need. If it did, I would purchase the product and that would be the end of the successful transaction. On the other hand, if I got to the store and the product was no longer available, my needs would not be met and that would not be a successful marketing venture. This type of situation happens a lot. We are coerced to go to a store for a particular sale item only to find that the sale item is no longer available. Sale advertising is sometimes used as a ploy to get customers to come to a store with the hope that they might find something else in the store to purchase instead of the original sales item.

Over the last few years there has always been at least one product for Christmas that is the 'must have' product. Examples of these are the Nintendo Wii, and the Tickle Me Elmo. These products were marketed using a high profile product launch. This would require a detailed plan for advertising, distribution and service. This created a product frenzy that resulted in mega profits for the producers. I can remember going to Walmart to ask when they would get their next shipment only to be told that it sold out again within 10 minutes. I guess it pays to know someone on the inside. It was many months

after the Christmas season before anyone could find a Wii system anywhere in Kelowna. I notice that this year the market has been flooded with the Wii Fit Plus, probably so that the previous fiasco will not be repeated.

Another recent example is the H1N1 situation. Here the health sector was so obsessed about marketing the 'need' for the flu shot that the public was so convinced of that need, they were willing to stand in long line ups for hours just to get that shot. Unfortunately, the marketing plan was not in line with the distribution plan. I believe that the blitz should have been toned down to coincide with when the shots were actually available. By creating this mismatch between the marketing efforts and the distribution of the flu shot, all that became really clear to the public is that our health system would not be able to handle a full blown epidemic of anything.

It is really important for a company to match its marketing plans to its distribution system. If it doesn't then it runs the risk of losing sales and customers as well as credibility. Locally, where there are a lot of small businesses whose ability to stay in business is solely based on reputation, this becomes even more important. So if you are marketing like crazy for Christmas, make doubly sure that you can satisfy your customers and it should be a fabulous money making season for you. For the rest of us, happy shopping.

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