

THE SOMETIMES UGLY DISCONNECT BETWEEN SALES AND MARKETING

Back in my early days on the street, I thought Marketing was Sales. There was no social media or website. The Marketing Coordinator prepared collateral and presentations and supported events at the direction of Sales, what we felt we needed to do for business development. It was blasphemy, the marketing person reporting to the Sales Manager! Now there was a “Promotions” Manager who reported to the General Manager but that role was totally disconnected from Sales.



Over time, marketing, advertising, and promotion in the digital world have become exponentially more complex and the introduction of new products and services in a global economy drives the bus. Marketing people became spin doctors for everything new and shiny and Sales was expected to take the story to the field and bring in the required revenue. Leaning on their relationships Sales was able to make it happen, for a short while. Now, some companies ask their customers what they need, conduct market research, offer product trials, create early adopters and capitalize on the ripple effect in the market. However, this is only successful for these organizations when the feedback from the street actually reaches the product development decision makers and when the process is nimble and flexible enough to allow for course corrections.

Let me give you an example. Several months ago I was told at my local Canadian Tire store that they were phasing out Canadian Tire bucks and was handed a new card to use to accumulate rewards points. I put it in the section of my man bag that held all the cards that I never use and wondered how well this would work in reality. How do you pull the currency on an iconic consumer program? This recall would be as big as Tylenol in the 80's with no one in danger of ingesting “bucks” that had been tampered with. A couple of weeks ago I stopped in again at Canadian Tire to buy some hardware. The self-serve cashier machine dispensed three crisp new “bucks” for my cash purchase. No prompt for my card. I put the bucks where I always had, in my car glove box, to be accumulated and used on a future purchase, thrown out when I cleaned the car or perhaps kept in my wallet for a third world vacation where I was asked to hand over all my money.

Is it possible somebody hit the pause button on the card launch? That enough franchisees sick of complaints convinced head office this brilliant plan was flawed because it destroyed two basic tenets of marketing: (1) it took away a decades' long unique selling proposition and (2) It gave each customer something of value they could touch and feel?

I hope that's what happened.

Why does CBC Radio do better in their markets with audience ratings than CBC Television? Because they're local, out in the community and talking about issues their customers want to talk about. Marketing supports that effort. In television, they are stuck with trying to figure out their mandate as a public broadcaster, have no strong connection points with the end user (ironically despite having a sales force while radio doesn't) and for years have tried to spin programming that Canadians should accept in their best interest.

Today the bigger the company, the more important it is that reverse engineering takes place. Market intelligence needs to make it back to where a product or service will be designed so that Sales has confidence that there is a need for it. Online, this happens intuitively. Consumers vote daily with their apps and are then prompted to look at similar products or purchases others have selected. Amazon Prime Daily is like a reverse Dutch auction on your smartphone displaying a variety of discounted merchandise that rolls over in minutes.

Offline, the concept of understanding local/regional needs and aligning product development and marketing to that is hugely difficult and expensive for global companies, I get that. However on behalf of all the frustrated humans in the world still carrying the title of “Salesperson”, it would be nice if someone listened from time to time.

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