

Innovative Marketing: Are You Using It?

By Linda Hanson, CMC

The term marketing was coined over 50 year ago and yet one form or another of marketing has been around since the beginning of time. But, these days marketing doesn't seem to be working as well as it has in the past. What's the problem? Is the basic marketing model flawed or is something else going on? The truth is that marketing is a little more complicated today, than in previous years.

Today, more than any other time in the past, you need to define how you're going to be distinctive—in marketing that is called branding. For example, the standard marketing model believes that if you shovel enough prospects into the top of the sales funnel and then use mass marketing you can reach a whole lot of people cheaply and simply and therefore you'll get enough business and be profitable. That doesn't seem to be working as well as it used to because of strong competition and look alike offerings.

Marketing has also swung around to support selling instead of the other way around. Marketing today often starts with “what do we want to sell” instead of addressing “who is the customer and what does he want.” It is aimed at getting people to buy things that the company wants to sell when it should be aiming at “how can I provide things the customer wants to buy?” In addition, there is the problem of companies separating their sales from their marketing efforts. Marketing is really the planning function that drives all the other tactics you use in your business. Think of marketing as the umbrella, sales as the handle, and the spokes (public relations, direct mail, advertising, sales promotion, and research) as the individual tools you can use to make your marketing plan work. All of these elements are what makes the umbrella and your marketing plan work.

A real flaw with today's marketing is continuing to do things the way we have always done them or believing that one piece of the plan is more important than another. The question we should ask about our marketing is, “Why.” Why do we do that? Why do we do it that way? How does that help the customer? The idea is to understand not only why you do things the way you do them but to further ask questions about your results. “What are the results we get from the way we do it?” If we are not customer oriented then we won't be successful. And success means more customers, higher sales and higher profits.

Getting Your Customers' Attention

Think about the fact that you can't grow revenue by selling the same old thing to the same old market in the same old way. Something needs to change. With many industries facing highly challenging times a few are finding that innovative marketing is the answer. For example, Kohl's department store came up with a radical idea---make it easy for the customer to shop. R. Lawrence Montgomery, CEO of Kohl's says, “Our whole philosophy is to get shoppers to spend less time in our stores and buy more.” They

did that by laying out their stores differently than their competitors. This is a simple, innovative and inexpensive marketing strategy.

In the suffering airline industry, Southwest Airlines has remained a leader. The often considered radical airline keeps its jets in the air for two or three hours longer than most of the other airlines because it has adopted a point-to-point routing system versus the hub-and-spoke model. Southwest does this to use its capital more efficiently while serving price-minded customers who want to go from place to place in a relatively short time, by frequently offering flights without much service. Southwest has been extremely aggressive about assimilating every new idea possible. Today, it does many things differently than it did 30 years ago -- but it's still serving essentially the same customers who have essentially the same needs.

The Ontario Government runs Showcase Ontario each year to celebrate the power of information technology to transform the public service. In an effort to increase attendance, the marketing team changed how they communicated with their prospects by becoming more tech-savvy. With a new strategic marketing e-mail campaign they increased attendance by 25% and were delighted when vendors rebooked 25 per cent of the exhibit space for next years event before the Showcase ended.

Making your marketing innovative takes planning but most of all it takes commitment. And it has to be personal and relevant to the customer. You have to develop something new, useful and value packed. And yet if you unlock innovation there is no limit to the potential of what you can create. All it takes is looking at your world in a slightly different way, knowing where you are headed and making the change.

*Linda Hanson, CMC, is a certified management consultant and author of 10 Secrets of Marketing Success. She writes, speaks and consults on strategic, marketing, and management issues and can be contacted at www.lhenterprises.com. Sign up for her **Free** on-line newsletter *The Superior Performance Report*.*