

# **DISPATCHES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

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Sunday, August 9, 2009

## **BECOME A CHAMPION OF CUSTOMERS**

*“We are the champions - my friends  
And we'll keep on fighting  
Till the end  
We are the champions  
We are the champions  
No time for losers  
'Cause we are the champions of the World”  
Queen*

During the debrief for a Customer Driven Marketing program we conducted for a medical device company one of the participants posed this question to the senior manager who hosted this learning event: “What one thing should we do following this program?” Obviously this participant felt she needed further direction. While we were somewhat taken back that she would not know what to do we did feel it expressed candor within an organization that is attempting to transition from small “m” marketing, which is service to sales oriented, to customer driven marketing.

Not being asked the question directly we had the opportunity to reflect upon versus react to it. We suggested to our host the following answer to the question, which is the essence of customer driven marketing:

*“Be a champion of customers  
to deliver relevant, meaningful differentiation  
that creates brand loyalty.”*

There's a lot of advice in these fourteen words. Let's take this advice apart piece by piece, starting at the bottom and finishing at the top, to ensure we capture its complete meaning.

- ***Create brand loyalty*** – The word “create” means to bring a customer into existence. “Brand” is not about artistic branding devices such as your logotype or icon. It's something more, much more. It's all about a special relationship with the customer that goes beyond not just the branding elements but the physical attributes of the product. It's a bond. Keep in mind that “loyalty” is a two way street. It is not just something, albeit a big something, that goes from customer to marketer but also marketer to customer. Loyalty is marked by unswerving devotion to each other.
- ***Deliver relevant, meaningful differentiation*** – When we use the term “relevant” we mean providing something that is perceived to be important to, and by, our customers -

present and prospective. But it is not enough to be merely relevant. Our competition may also be relevant. And, the relevance may be generic. Our relevance must be “meaningfully differentiated” from competition if we are to drive preference and create brand loyalty. We should always be on the lookout for ways to be uniquely relevant to our customers.

- ***Champion of Customers*** – With the word “champion” we are defining a requisite role in customer driven marketing. To be a champion is to exemplify excellence in promoting and supporting customers’ needs to the organization such that all resources are focused against meeting those needs. As champions our first obligation is to our customers, not our sales force, nor even our organization. Our objective is to serve (the right) customers, and better serve them than our competition. “Customers” are our focus. Instead of looking inward to the organization and what it feels it requires we are turning out attention outward to the world of our customers. We become customer centric, not product centric. We interact with our customers to serve them. Sound like heresy? Well, if we serve our customers well we are also serving our organization and sales force well too!
- ***Become*** – Are you there yet? Are you a champion of customers? Only you can answer that question. But even if you answer in the affirmative there’s always more each of us can do to develop further into one who serves customers. It’s a transformation from being “inner” directed, selling what we have, to being “other” directed, advocating for our customers. It’s also about becoming better as marketers too. It’s about striving for true marketing excellence.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS**

How do we transform ourselves to become champions of customers? Here are some thoughts for your consideration:

1. ***Choose*** – Our brands cannot be all things to all people. So we have to make choices. The first choice deals with people. Who, as in what customers, will devote ourselves, and our organizations, to serve? This requires thoughtful segmentation of the customer population. Once that is completed we must choose from among the diverse customer segments the specific segment we plan to target. Then, we commit ourselves to creating a mutually beneficial and enduring brand relationship. This will enable us to focus and marshal the organization’s resources to create impact, relevant impact.

With the target selected we go on to create the brand positioning strategy statement. Consider the statement in the aforementioned paragraph, “our brands cannot be all things...” We must choose what the brand will represent, the meaning we wish to establish with our target that will serve as the basis for our brand relationship. If we fail to choose here our brand meaning becomes diluted and may even blend with competition. The consequences of failing to choose the brand’s meaning can be expected to result in a weak relationship with customers, one that is dependent upon the customer’s relationship with the sales force (versus the brand or the organization) and/or price incentives.

2. ***Advocate*** – Get to know, really know your customer. You don’t get to really know the customer by reading research reports. You have to get out of the office and be with customers. Observe what they do. Importantly, learn why they do what they do. But don’t

stop here. Do what's needed to ensure everyone on the brand team (both internal and external to the organization) really knows the target customer. We should know the target so well that we can anticipate her/his needs. We should know the target so well that we can predict how they will behave to our initiatives. Whatever initiative you undertake ask yourself whether this reflects the values of your target customers and serves their needs.

Drive the target customers' needs, wants and values through the organization. To borrow from a quote from the late President John F. Kennedy "ask not what your target customer can do for you (your brand, company) but what you (collectively) can do for your target customer." Don't settle with being a "voice of the customer." It's too passive. Advocate (isn't that what champions do?) on behalf of the target customer. Push the organization beyond what is convenient for it, or merely acceptable to customers, to do those things that will win the hearts and minds of your target customers in creating brand loyalty.

3. **Act** – Act consistent with one who serves. Serve your customer in a way that borrows from and builds upon the brand positioning strategy. Don't just talk a good game (as in merely telling through advertising or sales presentations to customers), play a good game. Reflect the brand positioning in absolutely every initiative, everything you do! Practice "Power Positioning."
4. **Respond** – Former New York City mayor, Ed Koch, was often quoted as asking New Yorkers, "how am I doing?" or as he would say it "how'm I doing?" He was interested in knowing how well he was serving his constituency based upon their, not his, assessment. He was attempting to be responsive to the needs of his neighbors, the city dwellers. Inherent in his question was a larger question, "what else might I do for you?" Or, "how might I better serve you." Let's not stop with the execution of each initiative. Get in there and find out how it was received by your customers. We're not talking about "pass" or "fail" marketing research either. What we mean is finding out what happened (did it generate the behaviors we targeted?), why it happened (how did customers feel about the initiative - why or why not happen?) and what we may do in the future to make our initiatives more productive.

What we learn enhances our understanding of the target customer and brand relationship with them, provides important feedback for future actions, leads to the discovery of "legitimate" and "productive" insights, inspires appropriate advocacy on the target segment's behalf, and directs how the entire organization should act in serving our customer in a way that is relevant and meaningfully differentiated versus our competition. It about being responsive (how we should adapt to achieve behavior objectives) not reactive (blindly rush from one initiative to another with neither knowledge of performance or underlying customer factors). It's about creating a learning organization.

Become a champion of customers. Become a champion of the world.

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

*Contact information on the following page...*

**Richard Czerniawski**

.....  
430 Abbotsford Road  
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043  
tel 847.256.8820  
fax 847.256.8847  
.....

reply to Richard:  
[rdczerniawski@cs.com](mailto:rdczerniawski@cs.com) or  
[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com)

**Mike Maloney**

.....  
1506 West 13th Street, #17  
Austin, Texas 78703  
tel 512.236.0971  
fax 512.236.0972  
.....

reply to Mike:  
[mikewmaloney@gmail.com](mailto:mikewmaloney@gmail.com) or  
[mwm@bdn-intl.com](mailto:mwm@bdn-intl.com)

*Please forward any comments regarding the newsletter to Lori Vandervoort at our  
Central Division Offices of BDN International, 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780.  
[loriv@bdn-intl.com](mailto:loriv@bdn-intl.com)*

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