

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETING TRAINING

con-un-drum *n.* an intricate and difficult problem

Business managers today face a conundrum. As one manager put it “a Gordian knot” – a problem for which it is difficult to find a solution. The problem is that marketing managers are expected to grow sales, market share and profits and yet at the same time resources for marketing support are being slashed. This is truly our conundrum.

In order to solve it we need to grow our capabilities. We use the word “capabilities” instead of “competencies” since the later suggests that if you don’t possess it you are “incompetent.” We would hate to think any marketing managers are incompetent, wouldn’t we? Companies throughout the world recognize this need to grow individual and company capabilities in order to compete more effectively with, or without, less financial and/or people resources. So “Marketing Excellence” programs have sprung-up within many organizations. But as we have pointed-out on these same pages of past DISPATCHES marketing excellence is nothing more than getting marketers to some “norm” of competency for many organizations. Whatever the norm it is far from excellence.

The architects of organizational training need to approach this conundrum from different angles. The first is to identify clear goals. A key question to ask is “if the business needs to be up X% and resources are not growing as quickly, flat or even down Y% then what % do we need to grow the capabilities of our marketing managers and organization?” If we don’t grow individual and organizational capabilities then the likelihood of achieving our financial growth goals will become more wishful than predictable. Establishing the goal is a given best practice for all functions within an organization – marketing included.

With the goal in mind training needs to be developed and conducted to move people and the organization up the capability ladder. But not all training programs are going to be equal. Like marketing efforts, such as advertising, the training programs of some organizations are non-productive while the training programs of others are highly productive. What’s the difference? Here we will identify what we have discovered to be the “best practices” for marketing training.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS

1. ***Train for the mission*** – It is amazing to us that organizations will take months and sometimes years to discover what competencies marketers need to be more effective. How curious? Doesn’t the leadership know enough about marketing to know the role of

its marketers and therefore what they need to be capable of doing? In the first place the focus should not be on competencies. It should be on achieving the *mission*. A “best practice” for marketing training starts with training managers for their mission. This is no different than the military or sports teams. They train for their mission whether it is on the field of battle or play. The mission of marketers is to build brands. Those organizations that utilize best practices understand the mission to develop a *brand positioning strategy* and manage *Power Positioning* that leads to creating brand loyalty, and train for it. They understand the mission to develop *leadership advertising* that establishes a relevant, meaningfully differentiated promise and delivers it in a compelling campaign idea to achieve stretch business objectives. They train for the mission to *discover customer insights* that lead to a competitive positioning, repositioning or positioning (i.e., proactive positioning evolution) strategy, new products and/or services and leadership communications that drive customer preference. They train their marketers in developing *marketing plans* that marry brand and business planning. They train their managers to *coach*, as opposed to evaluate, the work of their resource teams in order to make proposed activities more productive. These are some of the important missions for which they train their managers. As these organizations train their managers for the mission the appropriate competencies are brought into play in an integrated manner and developed not for their own end but in achieving the mission.

2. ***Institutionalize the training into the operations of the organization*** – Training for the mission assists in institutionalizing the practices, tools and processes. While this is a good start it is not enough. If the training program merely focuses on the individual marketers then it has done nothing more than to build the individual capabilities of select managers. It has not grown the capabilities of the organization. Individual and organizational competencies must go hand-in-hand. Otherwise the learning and skill development of the individual will not be fully utilized and/or leveraged by the organization. Some managers will apply what they learn but the majority will not without it being adopted in the operations of the organization. More than likely many marketers will abandon the mission (such as developing a brand positioning strategy), even if they believe in it, because support for it by the organization leadership is absent (as perceived by senior leadership not demanding and reinforcing it). As a consequence marketing managers will revert to performing those urgent but non-critical activities (such as email) as opposed to applying their talents to those critical but non-urgent activities such as positioning the brand to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Best practices for institutionalizing demand that everyone, including senior leadership, undergoes the training. Let’s face it, no one in the marketing chain of command is beyond the need to be aware of, and skillful in, what is being trained if they are going to reinforce it on a daily basis in developing their managers and accomplishing the mission whether it be the development of a competitive brand positioning strategy or leadership advertising. Additionally, marketing support team members (such as advertising agency personnel, marketing research and even product research and development) are included in the training so all appreciate and can contribute to the achievement of the mission. Organizations rely on teamwork. All functions need to be pulling in the same direction if the mission is to be successful. (If you are reading this online, [click here](#) to hear Richard Czerniawski speak more about who needs training.)

Finally, the principles, tools, practices and processes are consciously adopted by the organization becoming a part of the marketing planning, new product and advertising development processes among others. For example: the positioning strategy statement and positioning matrix are incorporated into the marketing plan; the “tissue” session for the agency to share campaign ideas becomes a required step in the ad development process; the achievement of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) marketing objectives are quantified and proven to the business objectives; etc.

Institutionalization is about putting the training into practice in operations.

3. ***Training is designed and conducted by expert practitioners and reinforced by marketing management leadership*** - So few people in a given organization are expert marketing practitioners with real world successes. Fewer still have a broad view of marketing as practiced throughout the world, among different business sectors, companies and categories so they can capture and share *best practices* for achieving the mission. Fewer still can be objective and therefore willing to adopt new practices, tools and processes that are different than how their organization currently perceives and does things. And, yet fewer still will devote all of their time, one hundred percent of their being, to training as opposed to managing their brands. Best training practice is to use *outside expert practitioners* (as opposed to internal managers or academic theorists), albeit these organizations need to choose the expert practitioners that are best for their organization.

It is not enough to just use the outside experts for training. Best practice organizations include these experts, as partners, in the development of the training curriculum. The outside experts know the mission because they have successfully undertaken it. Importantly, they typically have a more realistic view of the capabilities and needs of the individual marketing managers and the organization. Moreover, as mentioned previously, they have a view of practices that is wide, going well beyond one company, sector, category or even country. So they can provide significant help with curriculum and individual program design.

Additionally, the best outside expert practitioners are ones who are *principle based* in their instruction. They focus on principles and skill development as opposed to preaching dogma, which typically results from internal managers establishing company versus principle based training programs. What organizations teach internally that they call principles is typically dogma regarding how they and/or the category do things. It undermines building critical thinking skills and, instead, focuses on small-minded execution, which is devoid of sound strategic thinking and results in fostering parity.

But best practices for marketing training also includes the utilization of the marketing management leadership within the company. It's not whether internal management resources are going to be used for training but how they will be employed. They leverage their senior managers not for formal training but for the critically important informal, day-to-day reinforcement of the principles, practices, tools and processes essential to achieving the mission. As such everyone aids and abets in the training to reinforce the formal training, building individual and organizational capabilities.

4. ***It's a curriculum, not a one-time event*** - Marketing managers and their organizations have many development needs. They cannot be addressed with one program or one event. That would be totally unrealistic. Even doctors and surgeons undergo “*Continuing Medical Education*” to stay abreast of the latest information and hone their skills. Professional athletes undergo training and practices throughout and following their seasons. There needs to be a series of programs, each inter-related and building upon the others. Additionally, best practices employ “familiar task transfer” where a learning and skill development in one mission carries over into another. For example, the way in which we select and define the target for the brand positioning strategy is utilized in the same way to select and define the target for any of our marketing mix elements, such as advertising. It includes the same elements even though the advertising target could be a sub-set of the positioning target. Another example is to create relevant and meaningful differentiation in our brand positioning strategy, communication strategy and messaging! This recognizes the need for two very important practices: repetition and progression. Best practice is to have many practices to be able to achieve the requisite skills. And when a skill level is reached it is important to progress to the next level of expertise. Development, whether it is to be individual or organizational, is a process of iteration and progression.
5. ***Develop skills versus merely impart information*** – Marketers have to be able to *just do it*. Organizations must be able to achieve it. What is it? The skill involved in successfully accomplishing the mission. It's one thing to explain segmentation and to know, intellectually, what it is. But it is an all-together different matter to have the requisite skills to be able to conduct market segmentation and select a strategically appropriate target customer. In order to develop skills managers need to undergo training programs that are experientially based, where they learn not from lecture but from doing. It is in the doing where real understanding takes place and skill development takes hold. Managers also need sound coaching that provides them with appropriate feedback from expert practitioners so that they, in turn, may adapt and develop requisite skills.
6. ***Measure, analyze, record and share learning from marketing activities to create a learning organization*** – This separates the great from good training organizations. Unfortunately, the vast majority of training programs overlook this essential practice. Great training organizations are learning organizations. They establish expectations for all activities and then inspect for what they expect. But it doesn't end there. They analyze the results, seeking understanding for actual performance versus expectations, and memorialize the learning. The learning is shared throughout the organization. In this way they create a learning culture and organization. Its managers are able to go beyond the formal training programs and informal training to make every activity a learning laboratory for themselves and the organization.

That's best training practices for marketing. It takes the employment of best practices to enable us, and our organizations, to achieve the best. It takes best practices to help us solve our conundrum. If you are interested in learning more please visit www.bdn-intl.com, drop us an email or give us a call.

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