DOES ANYBODY CARE?

William Daniels, the award winning American actor, perhaps, best remembered for playing Dustin Hoffman’s father in the 1967 film “The Graduate,” also portrayed John Adams in both the theatrical and film version of the musical “1776.” In one scene from 1776, Mr. Thompson, the secretary of the Continental Congress, delivers a dispatch to its members from General George Washington requesting a response for aid, one of 15 such dispatches that have gone unanswered. The General closes his latest dispatch asking, “Is anybody there? Does anybody care?”

John Adams (i.e., William Daniels), frustrated by his many failed attempts to get congressional members to commit (sound familiar) to supporting General Washington and declaring independence from England, echoes the General’s questions and adds another of his own which he sings with passion:

“Is anybody there? Does anybody care? Does anybody see what I see?”

Many marketers might find themselves feeling the same way when their target-customers do not respond as favorably as expected to their brand, their positioning, advertising and/or their marketing initiatives. Swelling with a strong belief in their offerings and armed with evidence that demonstrates clear superiority in the form of clinical studies, surveys, blind product testing, etc., they expect the market to swing in their favor upon a wave of changing target-customer behaviors. Yet, to their utter astonishment, the wave does not come or does not reach the level they believe their offering warrants. Like John Adams they might ask:

“Is anybody there?”

The Unacceptable Reaction

They’re there but these marketers just aren’t getting to them. When confronted with the sobering reality that the brand has failed to achieve its potential these same marketers will react with recommendations to educate the target-customer, inform them of their advantages and/or generate awareness regarding the product. But these reactions (all related incidentally), and the initiatives they give birth to, are likely to fail in both the absolute and relative to expectations.

What’s in awareness? J.C. Penney and Blackberry have awareness, a considerable amount actually. So the potential customer is aware. So what? Is that going to make these brands healthy? Get them back on track? Help these companies regain their glory years? No, not really. Awareness is never enough.
Then there’s the proposal to inform or educate potential customer. To what end??? What is the value of education? Let’s take cigarette smoking as an example where education regarding, and awareness of, its ill effects has been going on for years, and yet smoking still remains a leading blight on the human condition. Billions of dollars have been spent educating consumers regarding the perils of smoking. It seems as though new studies are released nearly every month revealing the dangers of cigarette smoking and informing the public of rather dire consequences from engaging in it:

- Smoking causes lung cancer. In fact, 90% percent of lung cancer in men and 80 percent in women is caused by smoking.
- Smoking is the most preventable cause of death. Let’s repeat that, “SMOKING IS THE MOST PREVENTABLE CAUSE OF DEATH.”
- In the U.S., smoking causes 1 out of every 5 deaths.
- It has been reported that smokers die 13 to 14 years earlier than nonsmokers.
- Smoking exponentially increases the risk of developing other lung diseases, like emphysema and chronic bronchitis.
- Smoking leads to a higher risk for cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, bladder, pancreas, kidney, cervix and stomach.
- Smoking also elevates the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke and insulin resistance.

So, smoking is bad for your health. Got it? Duh. Who doesn’t? Yet, despite the exorbitant price of cigarettes (which in my current home state of Illinois is more than $12 for a pack of Marlboro “red” and in my birth state of New York is about $15) more than 20% of the adult population smoke cigarettes. (By the way, smoking remains a problem worldwide. The percentage of the adult population claiming to have smoked a cigarette in the past week varies by country from a fraction of the U.S. level to as high as 40%. That’s the level of smokers the U.S. registered in the 1970s for crying out loud.) And while the percentage of smokers has been cut in half (perhaps because of the rather unaffordable price for a pack of cigarettes, frequent nagging by loved ones to quit, bans on smoking in public places, the stink that lingers on smokers, increase in cleaning bills, increase in insurance premiums, troubling side effects such as smoker’s cough and just feeling lousy, and being made to feel like a pariah by non-smokers for inflicting the curse of second and third hand smoke upon them) the level is still above 20% in the U.S. And, the decline in smoking has stalled since 2004.

What’s more the smoking level in U.S. high schools is about 18%. That’s nearly one in every five high school students. These are adolescents! About 20% of teens smoke worldwide. It’s shameful that some 80,000 to 100,000 children begin smoking every day. And, half of those who begin smoking in adolescent years are projected to continue to smoke for another 15 to 20 years. Obviously, education is not all it’s cracked-up to be.

Our actions to address lower than expected marketplace performance should not be reactions but thoughtful responses focused on achieving specific customer behaviors. Think first about the customer behaviors you want to influence and then determine how to achieve them.

Education for education sake is not the answer. This came home to one of our clients in the medical device area. He stated that he gets involved in developing sales materials to inform and educate customers about his company’s products. But he now recognizes that it has no impact on the business. He shared with us that when presented with the information surgeons merely nod
their heads and then go about doing what they had previously been doing. No behavior change. No impact on the business.

“Does anybody care?”

**Getting Prospective Customers to Care**

No, it’s not about education, informing or generating more awareness. It’s about getting potential customers to care such that it generates the behavior you seek. And, in order to get them to care we need to get them to feel it. “It” being what your offering can do or means for them. This can be communicated through product design, packaging, messaging, etc., by dramatizing benefits, or consequences.

Do health care practitioners know that if the patient doesn’t get a supportive treatment that s/he might develop complicating problems? Of course they do! Do consumers know that if they don’t have basic health insurance their life savings can be wiped out by an unforeseen medical emergency? Of course they do! So what’s stopping HCPs from prescribing what you know to be an essential supportive care product or switching to a product with proven superior clinical results for a given condition? What’s stopping consumers from purchasing health insurance or paying a premium for a policy with better coverage? Feeling it. They understand it intellectually but do not feel it in their hearts and souls. How can you get customers to change behavior without getting them to care? And how can you possibly get them to care if they do not feel it? There’s no way around it, in order to get customers to care we must first get them to feel it. We do this through dramatization of the benefit or consequences.

The following video is an illustration of dramatizing versus merely informing through word choice. This dramatization leads people to feel something viscerally and, therefore, to care sufficiently about the plight of a blind man that compels them to help. (You can view the video at the following link, [https://vimeo.com/bdni/review/77933998/4990a4c17b](https://vimeo.com/bdni/review/77933998/4990a4c17b)).

Do you feel it? Do you feel it enough to care for this man? How many helpless people who have requested your help have you ignored or refused aid? Chances are they informed you of their situation but did nothing to move you. They did not dramatize the impact of your help or lack thereof. But doesn’t this dramatization make you feel for the blind man? Does it make you feel a sense of gratitude for your luck in life? Do you now care enough to drop a coin in his cup? We do and bet you do too.

Here’s one of our all-time choices for ads that make you feel enough to take action on behalf of the featured brand. It is an ad that ran in medical journals many years ago for the pharmaceutical Aricept. This is a drug to treat Alzheimer’s disease. This is a progressive disease for which there currently is no cure. The most one can expect from the treatment is to slow the progression of memory loss, which is the product benefit. As a result (the customer benefit), the HCP’s Alzheimer patients can hold onto their memories (and life). Yet, this communication moves HCPs to actually care for the patients’ and the plight of their patients’ families, and feel the promise of what this drug can do for their patients. This is emotive communications. **In order to get prospective customers to feel it and therefore care enough to change their behavior our initiatives must be emotive. Drama stirs the emotion.**
“Does anyone see what I see?”

Selling Protection for a Product that is Not Needed and for an Event that May or May Not Occur

This is one of the most challenging marketing problems: Health care marketers may find themselves with products for which, because of weak business results, they believe there is no need. An example might be a product that does not treat or remedy a disease but prevent a potential problem from manifesting itself. The belief that there is no need for such a product is triggered because it has failed to reach goals that were set for it. But we believe this is a defensive reaction to the sales shortfall. There is clearly a need for a supportive product. If the marketer doesn’t understand this s/he will not be able to market the product successfully. The issue is that the marketer has not yet been able to get the HCP to care about the difference the product can make with or mean to their patients. These marketers have not been able to get their prospective customers to feel what their clinical studies are showing or what these HCPs may be experiencing in their practice. We’ve got to get prospective customers to think with their heads but lead with their hearts.

Medical practitioners have been educated and introduced to a plethora of sanitary anti-infection programs to get them to wash their hands before and after examining each and everyone of their patients. There is a growing risk of infections to hospital patients such that they may be released from a hospital sicker than when they entered. While these hand washing programs result in a decline in the rate of infections they tend to be short lived. The hospital staff becomes complacent and the infection rate reverses itself and climbs. The problem is that these HCPs don’t feel it such that they care enough to be meticulous in taking steps to prevent a problem that
may or may not occur. They need to be able to feel the impact on their patients’ well being if they are going to care enough to stick with a program.

Insurance companies are proof that we can even sell protection for an event that may or may not occur. We purchase it based upon our tolerance for risk. We purchase health insurance but don’t expect to be ill. We purchase life insurance to protect our families but don’t expect to die. Why? Because sound marketers make us feel the pain of consequences from not having insurance or a suitable policy. They dramatize it for us so that their message gets through to influence our behavior. The Allstate “Mayhem” campaign is a dramatization that makes us feel the consequences of being underinsured and care enough to do something about it – like go with Allstate. (You can view the video at the following link, https://vimeo.com/bdn/review/77934151/a526515b8b).

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:
Just because sales results trail expectations does not mean that no one is there. Prospective customers are out there. It is our job to get them to care to attract them to our brands. We do this by dramatizing so that our marketing is emotive. If they care they will demonstrate it through their behaviors. And, we will realize sales and brand success. Here are some suggestions for your consideration:

1. Drop the knee-jerk reaction regarding awareness and education. Think about the specific action (i.e., behavior) you need prospective or current customers to take. Choose a customer behavior such as “switching” or “adoption” and quantify it.

2. Now get beyond the conventional responses of bolstering awareness or education. Open your mind to creating initiatives that serve as stimulus to achieve the behaviors you seek.

3. Don’t tell or sell but compel customers to action by developing emotive initiatives (such as messaging) that enables them to feel your difference and care about your offering. This will require you to go beyond telling to dramatizing the benefit or consequence.

4. Regarding proposed initiatives such as messaging, don’t choose anything that you do not feel enough to make you care and, in turn, trigger the desired behavior. You don’t have to select the best option from those being pitched by support staff. Select an option only if you believe (in your gut) it will trigger the desired customer behavior. Ah, and backup your gut with marketing research.

5. Review brands from other categories that are marketing products for protection against events that may or may not occur. Identify the principles they use to get prospective customers to feel, care and change behaviors. Apply those principles that you believe are appropriate to your situation.

What we’ve shared here is not new. Anyone who has participated in any of our marketing training programs or been a reader of DISPATCHES has heard us stress the importance of identifying the behavior objective you want and getting customers to care enough to take it. You have also heard that for customers to care they must feel it. And, in order for them to feel it we need to be emotive in our marketing though the use of drama. Yet, few marketers have taken this advice to heart and made a practice of it. What are you going to do about it?
“Is anybody there?  
Does anybody care?  
Does anybody see what I see?”

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