

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

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

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## **GET “STREET SMARTS”**

Certainly you’ve heard the expression “street smarts.” It’s an expression used to describe someone, as in “s/he has street smarts.” It refers to someone who has common sense and knows what is going on and how to operate in the real world. While someone may have “book smarts” (i.e., learning from books or an advanced degree such as an MBA or PhD) s/he may be lacking street smarts if he isn’t spending time in the real world and learning from his environment and experiences.

Unfortunately, many marketers lack “street smarts.” Instead of getting out into the field with their sales force, “where the rubber meets the road,” they believe they can identify opportunities and resolve problems within the confines of their “ivory tower.”

The term “where the rubber meets the road” is that point where the real action takes place. It is where reality and truth may be found. It is in many cases where our sales force and customers intersect. Although it can also be where our brand and customer intersects such as the retail environment, doctor’s office and even the home. However, this article will deal with where the sales force and their customers are engaged.

Street smarts is neither found nor cultivated in the “ivory tower,” which is a term used to suggest a place remote from reality. The ivory tower is about theoretical, hypothetical or Pollyanna (blindly or illogically optimistic) thinking. Ivory tower thinking is not grounded in reality. It is a place that cultivates “groupthink.” Groupthink is driven by conformity, which can lead to irrational or dysfunctional decisions. Therefore, to avoid “ivory tower” thinking, it is important, very important to spend time going into the field to learn from the sales reps and their customers.

Where do you find “ivory tower” thinking? You’ll find it in the ivory tower, of course. The ivory tower is your corporate offices. That’s the place that encourages conformity and harmony in thinking and decision-making. It’s the place that retards creativity. Malcolm Gladwell noted that creativity in corporate America indexes at 85, which is 15% below the norm. So, “yes,” It’s important to get out of the ivory tower and get to where the rubber meets the road.

### **Case Study**

On a recent assignment we designed our action plan to include interviews with sales personnel. We wanted to learn what we needed to help our client craft an appropriate messaging strategy for “gatekeeper” customers. So, we went to “where the rubber meets the road.” There was nothing theoretical in the responses of the sales personnel we interviewed. No “ivory tower” thinking. It wasn’t about what should be, but what is. It was based upon their knowledge of their customers and experiences in selling the brand, following the direction of marketing and executing marketing developed messaging and programs.

The learning was highly relevant and beneficial. The sales reps were able to provide us with a profile of those customers who are loyal to the brand and those who have not yet adopted it. Importantly, they identified the reasons for each. They identified the competition and their messaging. They also shared messaging that they have found to be effective in achieving desired behavior objectives along with messaging that has not been effective. Additionally, they were able to shed light into segmentation of potential customers and priorities for targeting customers and resources.

The value of getting out of the ivory tower and away from navigating reams of marketing research data enabled us to get at the truth regarding the specific information we really needed to help make better decisions.

### **Benefits**

There are a number of important benefits to getting out of the ivory tower to where the rubber meets the road among which are:

1. ***It's where you'll find reality*** – It's about the reality of customer engagement with your brand, strategies and marketing initiatives.
2. ***It's marketing research you can afford (and can't afford to overlook)*** – Marketing research budgets are frequently cut. Or we find we don't have sufficient funding to conduct all the research we may believe we need. While it is not quantitative it will help to glean invaluable information and aid in the discovery of insights that can aid in decision making, inspire creativity and, if you have the resources, the development of hypotheses for subsequent quantitative market research studies and/or testing.
3. ***It's feedback on your marketing*** – Unfortunately, few organizations require marketers to inspect for that which they expect from strategies and initiatives. Instead, corporations have marketer doing, doing, doing - often without thinking and, certainly, without reflection. Getting out with sales personnel will provide important feedback on those strategies and initiatives you've put into the field to grow the brand.
4. ***It contributes to alignment, and a more productive relationship, with the sales force*** – Undoubtedly the most important resource in pharmaceutical and medical device marketing is the sales force. And, the sales force is undoubtedly important in all businesses. Frequent and meaningful dialoguing with sales personnel will help you tap into their knowledge, thinking and real world experiences. It will also serve to help you develop a more productive relationship. Everyone likes to know that her/his thinking is valued. So s/he will give it freely in the hope that it will help marketers better help them in being successful. Importantly, alignment in thinking will contribute to alignment in actions.
5. ***It reveals opportunities and problems*** – There will be issues that arise at the point of engagement that will reveal opportunities you might capitalize upon, and problems that need to be resolved. It will aid in seeing not only what is happening in the now but those opportunities and problems that are in nascent stages of development and need to be addressed in order to preserve or accelerate future growth.
6. ***It contributes to the development of creative and effective solutions*** – Specifically, sales personnel, who have a deep understanding of their customers, can assist you in

identifying potential strategies and initiatives to capitalize on opportunities and overcoming problems.

7. *It aids in making sound decisions* – It's pure and simple. Your decisions will only be as good as the information you are basing those decisions. The sales force will be able to provide you with relevant and accurate information.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

You're not going to get "street smarts" by sitting in your "ivory tower." In order to get "street smarts" you need to get out into the field where the "rubber meets the road." One of the first actions I undertook with every brand I marketed was to go into the field to meet with sales personnel and call on customers with them. On every occasion, without fail, I learned something of value that I was able to immediately apply that contributed to brand health and sales growth.

While we could provide you with a list of "boats & helicopters" for your consideration, we're going to make this simple because it should be simple and obvious. If you want to get "street smarts" and make immediate contributions to your brand's development then ***GET OUT OF YOUR IVORY TOWER AND GET INTO THE FIELD WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD.***

Perhaps, there is something else. "***Listen.***" Really hear what is being said. "***Think.***" Get beyond your preconceived notions and groupthink to weigh the meaning and implications of what you hear and experience. "***Act.***" Make something happen.

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