

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, November 29, 2009

THE BIGGEST EXCUSE IN MARKETING: “*BUT MY BUSINESS IS DIFFERENT.*”

From time to time in our training programs and consulting workshops we hear clients tell us things like this: “Remember, ours is a low-involvement category”; “Keep in mind that we are highly regulated by the FDA”; and, “Ours is a very competitive industry.” Sometimes, we hear similar things, but posed as an innocent question: “What differences do you see when you are working with medical marketers versus when you are working with fast-moving consumer goods marketers?” We say this is an “innocent question” because it is usually a thinly veiled comment akin to those already mentioned. What the client is really seeking in all of these comments and questions is a nod from us that gets them off the hook...a kind of an agreed understanding that, well, because their business is so different, you can’t really expect them to apply all the fundamental principles of brand-building and brand positioning.

We refuse to go along with this line of thinking. It becomes a lame excuse for not trying to out-think one’s competition. In fact, there are differences among all businesses—*executional* differences: legal regulations that prohibit certain kinds of promotion, for example; infrastructural differences that affect a company’s choices in going to market; even types of media that are commonly employed within a given industry (like professional journals instead of traditional broadcast media). But there are no real differences from industry to industry when it comes to thinking *strategically*, when it comes to building a winning brand in the marketplace. The strategic principles demanded for winning brands just happened to start with consumer goods; today they apply universally.

To marketers who shy away from the tough strategic thinking brand-building requires (because “their business is different”), we say “Get over it!” And to help them in getting over it, for this week’s Boats & Helicopters we offer our list of the Top 10 Things to Start and Stop Doing.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

- 1. Start wanting to build a brand (not merely a product).** This sounds so obvious, but in fact there are still so many companies who focus their marketing and selling efforts on establishing the features, attributes, and “product” benefits of their products...instead of *adding* meaningful higher-order functional and emotional benefits (like “what’s in it for the customer” and “how that makes the customer feel”) to the effort. Features, attributes, and product benefits (“what the product does”) are easily matched by other products; but meaningful, higher-order functional and emotional benefits are not so easily copied.
- 2. Stop settling for sales “transactions” and start aiming for brand “relationships.”** This is perhaps another way of saying build brands and not just products, but with an

important twist: trusted brands behave like trusted people—they engender a relationship with a customer or consumer that is not easily broken, even when confronted with innovations or unusual promotions from competitors that are attractive. Sales transactions are momentary; brand relationships endure.

3. **Start insisting upon meaningful differentiation.** And this starts with the brand positioning. Settling for “class effect” benefits in a pharmaceutical or medical device positioning is inexcusable because it implies that no one on the brand-building team thought through the clinical trials needed to achieve a meaningful, differentiated benefit claim. It means that the marketing team (okay, even the Company) was content to enter the market as merely an “acceptable” number three, or four, or five.
4. **Stop treating the Sales Force as the customer.** The Sales Force is a critically important bridge to understanding a brand’s target customer, especially in the professional classes like drugs and devices. Many salespeople in the medical device and diagnostic industry spend long hours with their surgeon customers, often in the operating theater. But they are not the customer! They do not live inside the head and heart of the customer. And to build a winning brand we have to get inside the head and heart of that customer.
5. **Stop asking customers (and the Sales Force!) what they like and don’t like.** When trying to get inside the minds and hearts of the brand’s target customer, it doesn’t matter what he or she *likes*. What matters are these things: Do potential target customers perceive a meaningful benefit in what we offer? Do they find that benefit differentiated? Might they choose to select our brand over others, given that benefit-offering?
6. **Start firing some customers.** That’s right, eliminate some from your brand positioning target. No brand has the resources to position itself equally well against all customers in the market (particularly against customers who already have a longstanding, loyal *relationship* with a competitive brand). Instead, conduct a reliable marketplace segmentation and then choose the one or two market segments that the brand has the best potential to build loyal relationships with.
7. **Start adding a *perceptual* dimension to the brand’s Competitive Framework (in the brand positioning).** It doesn’t usually take a lot of thought to identify a brand’s competitive set—most customers know all the brands in a given class or category anyway. But it does take a good deal of creativity and strategic thinking to come up with a perception that takes your brand “beyond the class.” Winning brands use a perceptual frame to transition from being simply another statin to being perceived as “The Cholesterol Reducer”; and from being another artificial knee to being perceived as “The Joy of Motion Restorer.”
8. **Start focusing everything the brand does on the one or two benefits the brand stands for.** If you have already built meaningful differentiation into the product, have segmented the market cleverly, and chosen a potentially loyal target, this focus should come easily. But if you continue to load positioning implementation materials (like selling brochures) with class effect features, attributes, and “product” benefits, the focus will never happen. Rather, the Sales Force will continue to do what comes naturally to them: customize what the brand stands for on a customer-by-customer basis...and the

product (not a brand!) will stand for what all others in the class stand for—efficacy, safety, and tolerability.

9. Start consciously creating a differentiated Brand Character. So often this essential brand positioning element is overlooked, or purposefully ignored. Marketers with relatively short patent-life products sometimes makes excuses such as, “We’re not Coke. We only have ten years as a brand, so we can’t really establish a brand personality.” But there are plenty of short-lived brands that have done just this: Lipitor, Zithromax, Zoloft, The Zimmer Gender Knee, The (original) Cordis Stent, to name a few. If you really want to achieve a loyal relationship with a set of customers, there is nothing more powerful than having a brand-ownable character that those customers affiliate with.

10. Start resisting the usual. Take a good, hard look at your brand’s positioning and at the things you do routinely to implement that positioning...and ask yourself, honestly, is this virtually what every other brand in the category stands for and does? If it is, start every new positioning and initiative effort by having the brand-building team identify those approaches which would be counter-the-usual. And DO some of them!

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

Richard Czerniawski

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

Mike Maloney

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

Reply to Richard:
rdczerniawski@cs.com or
richardcz@bdn-intl.com

reply to Mike:
mwm@bdn-intl.com or
mikemaloney@gmail.com



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