

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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WHEN MARKETING SUCKS

When marketing sucks it can be really ugly. The result is falling forecasts, lost jobs, ignominy for the failing organization, erosion of customer confidence, loss of employee morale, dashed careers and plenty of blame to go around. Duck! Here comes some now.

In one of our recent programs we had participants analyze communications for 3 products from the same category. Each one is a line extension of a well-known brand. Following the analysis we asked participants to identify the one product extension they judge has the strategic advantage. 50% identified one product while the remaining 50% selected a second product. It was a dead draw between two of the three products. No one selected the third product despite the fact that it was one of their sister company's product introductions. This is extraordinary as managers typically are much more favorable to one of their own while they tend to underestimate competitive products and brands.

While we certainly did not disagree with the outcome we were nonetheless astonished that the company brand failed to garner one supporter. A participant, who has knowledge of the questionable product, shared that it did so poorly in the marketplace that it was discontinued within just one year following its introduction. How can anything fare so poorly when intelligent people have launched it, under the banner of a highly credible brand no less? The marketing sucks.

There are, undoubtedly, a number of factors contributing to failure. All comprise poor marketing. All could have been caught to avert an ill-conceived effort that tanked. Here's what we can (re)learn:

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

- 1. A product extension needs to be consistent with the positioning of the mother brand.**
The failed product was inconsistent with the therapeutic equity of the brand. Instead it opted for a cosmetic benefit, which was superficial within the context of the brand's positioning, and the competitive offerings. If the extension is inconsistent with the brand positioning the choice is clear. Halt further development and allocation of resources. Don't launch. There are a number of reasons not to proceed with it. Among the most prominent reasons are it: a) will dilute or undermine the brand's established equity; and b) takes so much more resources to establish something different than expected from the brand among current customers and/or attract new users from other brand franchises.

2. **The product must be sound.** This product did not appear to be sound. By “sound” we mean that the product will deliver on the benefit promise. In this case, it attempted to support the benefit promise to customers with a feature that is perceived by participants, and us, as gimmicky. Even if the benefit is perceived to be meaningful to some customers, the believability of product performance is judged to be suspect, highly suspect.
3. **Be customer centric.** Was there really a customer need for the product? Or was it a manufacturer need for something new to bolster sales? Did the brand group expect this product to find a place or stick in the marketplace? Or was the brand group interested in filling pipeline, or securing retail shelf space or fulfill some other manufacturer driven need? It is highly likely the organization put itself ahead of the customer.
4. **Check, and recheck, before launching.** Did anyone talk with consumers, as in a concept test, prior to development? Did the brand conduct consumer home use tests among the target group (or among concept acceptors and concept rejecters) to determine if the product itself fulfilled the benefit promise and generated favorable purchase interest? Was testing conducted to determine the effectiveness of marketing mix elements such as communications? It is highly doubtful that the failed product was subjected to rigorous analysis anywhere in its short history from development to discontinuance. The check isn't just to determine pass or fail but to gain valuable customer feedback needed to iterate, if appropriate, its way to success.
5. **Put your money where your mouth is and provide adequate marketing support.** This product category is purchased once every 7-months. In other words approximately one-seventh of the total target population is in the market in any given month. (There is little seasonality to the category.) So if the bulk of the marketing support funding is spent within the first month, or 6-weeks, it is only relevant to about 14% of the population. This is insignificant volume when factored over 12-months (or 2 buying periods). The support quickly evaporates before it can work against the remaining 86% of the market population. If the product is truly worth introducing then it needs to be supported beyond the launch period.

When marketing sucks it's not merely the fault of the product. Nor is it solely the fault of the brand team. It's also a failure of the organization.

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