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MARKETING AFTER THE SALE — ESTABLISHING "PURCHASE TRUST"TM

We know that top line revenue is clearly a sales and marketing responsibility. Profitability is largely determined by the marketing strategy of pricing. Whether it be you, General Motors, General Mills, General Foods or General Confusion, all of you sell products or services to the same customers:

1. Current users who like you
2. Non-users who have never tried you because
 - a) either they don't know of you or
 - b) you haven't given them a compelling reason to try you
3. Trier/rejecters who have tried you and don't like you

There are only 3 ways to build any business

1. Get those who use you to buy more from you, and buy from you more often
2. Get those who don't use you to use you by giving them a provocative and compelling reason to try you (trial from new users).
3. Successfully take a price increase past cost inflation.

That's it — there is no other way to build a successful, profitable business.

CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF VALUE

Customers will buy more product from you and buy from you more often, only if *they perceive that you have met or exceeded their expectations of "value."*

NOTE: Your only reality is your customer's perception, of the value you delivered. It makes little difference what you think about your "value": your only reality is what your customer perceives.

Furthermore, it makes no difference if their perceptions are right or wrong. Your only reality is what perception a user has of your performance, i.e. what value you have delivered for the price they paid you.

MARKETING AFTER THE SALE

This is Marketing's most missed business opportunity. It is marketing's job to influence purchase decisions a) before the sale, b) during the sale and c) after the sale.

Influencing purchase decisions is clearly a marketing responsibility.

Who is the most likely candidate to buy your product? *Answer:* A recently satisfied user of your product. How do you know *you're* satisfied? *Answer:* By having your purchase expectations met or exceeded. If your customer's expectations are met or exceeded, there is a strong potential that they will buy from you again.

How can we strengthen the potential of a user becoming a repeat purchaser of our product? By influencing their perceptions after the sale.

I have recently identified this area of After-the-Sale-Marketing as "Purchase Trust."

CREATING "PURCHASE TRUST"

How do or can we best establish "Purchase Trust"? By going back to our current users, after the sale, and strongly, clearly merchandising, that we have just delivered the value we promised. If we didn't deliver the value as promised, then we're here to correct it, to make it right and then, aggressively merchandise

- that we were Johnny on the spot and made certain that we delivered on your expectation of value.

Our after-the-sale marketing efforts are focused to influence purchase decision-maker's perceptions about our value and to establish in their minds a strong level of "Purchase Trust" or confidence, and a desire to want to use us again for the same or similar solution. Hopefully, the satisfied and merchandised user will purchase greater quantities of the proven product, or additional product solutions which we market.

The key is to aggressively merchandise, market, and promote the many values *we have just delivered* to our customers!

HOW TO DO IT

How do I make my boss, my president, my owner go along with Purchase Trust? How do I secure an after-the-sale marketing budget to develop Purchase Trust for my company or department?

Clearly, the lifeblood of our business is in (1) converting initial trial users to ongoing users and (2) selling more product to satisfied users and, of course, continuing to satisfy them.

Our first step then, is to make certain we are satisfying user expectation levels. Ask yourselves, are we really delivering and then merchandising the *value* of our overall solution?

Make certain you clearly know and understand what "value" your users are looking for.

1. Monitor, measure and report (to yourself or superior) on
 - a) what is our customer re-order frequency (how often - are they repeat purchasing)
 - b) what is our customer re-order magnitude (size of re-order)
 - c) what is our trial and conversion ratio (repeat business from 40–60–80% of first time users?)
 - d) what about product returns – growing/declining (?)
 - e) what about customer complaints – growing/declining (?)

3. Use direct "Sales" follow-up (many say they do — few do it!)

ASK YOUR CUSTOMER

- a) Did I meet your expectations?
- b) Did I get it right the first time?
- c) Were my people easy to talk with?
- d) Were they helpful?
- e) If we didn't get it right, did we fix it to your satisfaction?
- f) Did we fix it in a timely manner?
- g) Will you buy from me again?

NOTE: When you ask these questions, you are reinforcing your *value*.

4. Do formal research among current users and non-users or even competitive users.
 - a) Qualitative Research – focus groups, (be careful — they provide language, not direction or strategy)
 - b) Quantitative Research – i.e. formal customer usage survey (via phone, mail, intercept and one-on-one interview, etc.) - maybe use an outside research group.

5. The key to any customer feedback is to listen.

Most owners and managers ask "tell me how we're doing?" Then they don't listen to the answers. They become defensive, and end up doing most of the talking.

Most of us don't really listen — and we should.

6. Maintain a "Problem Log" of customer complaints and errors that we know are ours. Meet on a regularly scheduled basis with appropriate personnel to discuss –
 - a) What happened?
 - b) Why did it happen?
 - c) How we will eliminate its reoccurrence?
 - d) Who will fix it?
 - e) When will they fix it?

7. Develop in-house training programs
 - a) that correct erroneous activity and behavior
 - b) that reinforce correct behavior
 - c) that upgrade employee skill level

DEVELOPING AN ACTUAL AFTER-THE-SALE MARKETING PLAN

1. Develop and implement a sequenced communication plan for all
 - a) key accounts (ongoing) and
 - b) for all new users – regardless of size

It may vary by account or market segment but it must identify —

- a) the client we contact
- b) who at the client we contact
- c) what we communicate
- d) who communicates for us
- e) timing of communications

2. Establish a thorough, efficient and easily usable Customer Information File System for tracking current and potential targeted clients.

Include entries for client follow-up discussions and when we might expect the next order.

NOTE Marketing is responsible for developing the After-the-Sale marketing plan and all support materials. However, Sales is responsible for implementing the plan.

3. Develop and implement ongoing customer contact training for company personnel other than Sales — especially finance and shipping department personnel.

In merchandising a high level of business performance, everyone in your company should know how to speak with customers and handle their inquiries — on the phone or in person.

4. Think of ways you can become more important to your clients.
 - a) Forwarding new product, packaging or billing information in a convenient easy-to-read (and file) manner.
 - b) Become a trade show exhibitor at clients' local or national association meeting
 - become a keynote or workshop presenter
 - become an associate member of clients' association

- c) Use clients in your advertising and promotion programs, such as advertising testimonials and joint promotions

5. Finally, but of critical importance, throw out or incinerate anything with the words customer service on it.
 - a) Customer service means very little in the U.S.
 - b) Owner, president, key management, the entire corporate culture must embrace a philosophy of 100% Customer Satisfaction and focus on the customer. This must be evident in corporate actions – not in corporate words!

SUMMARY

Business mediocrity abounds. It is easier today to be a stronger performer and be more profitable than in the recent past. To succeed, a business need only perform above mediocrity — a "C" level.

Does your company perform above a "C" level?

Do *you* perform above a "C" level?

After-the-Sale-Marketing will significantly increase your business performance, in gaining incremental sales and flexibility towards premium pricing and incremental profit.

Most people would rather die than think and most people do. Don't you be one of them.

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