

A REALITY CHECK ON YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

The 'Marketing Strategy' is the way we have come up with for achieving our marketing goals and it should include two mandatory elements:

- Which target consumers whom we can reach, hold a viable potential to buy whatever we intend to sell?
- What is the offer (the entire marketing mix) we will be presenting to these consumers in order to appeal to them and thus realize the said potential, given their alternatives?

You must not think of these as two separate questions but rather as two parts of the same idea. Let me clarify. What are "target consumers with a potential to buy"? These are consumers (a sizeable enough group with buying power) likely to desire what you are offering. Why would they want it? That is the potential that you are supposed to identify. There may be several reasons. For example, maybe they are not consumers of your kind of product yet, however, they might be if something happens, or if they are exposed to a certain message. It could be that they have special needs or preferences, which up until today were not catered to by any of your competitors' offers (and don't forget that psychological, social, aesthetic needs are real needs). Maybe they are bored with what they routinely buy. When you identify such a situation, you know that the potential is there.

Identifying potential is only the initial stage of your mission, of course. Your strategy would also have to include something that you are going to offer these consumers that might improve their situation in a certain way, solve a problem, give them more than what they already get for the same price, or open new opportunities for them. In short, something that will motivate them to buy from you and thus materialize the potential.

The 'Marketing Scenario' is a synopsis of the logic of your marketing strategy. In the same breath, it also enables you to make sure that that logic really works. The 'Marketing Scenario' translates the 'Marketing Strategy' to simple everyday language. How will it happen in reality? How will the materialization of marketing goals occur? I don't know whether or not you have already sunk in this fact, but marketing goals are achieved through customer acts. So, let's assume that we install a webcam with enhanced psychological insight capabilities inside the market and that it captures the materialization of our marketing plan, one purchase after another.

What is the 'Marketing Scenario'?

The 'Marketing Scenario' is an amazingly simple tool to use: Only four questions. Are you jotting this down?

1. Who are the people who we believe have the potential of buying what we intend to sell? Yes, these are the same people we so often refer to as the 'Target Consumers'. First, we must define our targets. What do these people have in common that makes them probable prospects (in the sense that they are likely to be particularly interested in our offer)? We could use demographic, socioeconomic, psychographic, as well as lifestyle descriptions. Note that at times, we target not a specific group but a wide almost indefinable group of people in a specific mood, a specific situation, or a specific need or state. Make room for another possibility. You can target not a defined group of consumers but rather a state of need/desire or a consumption context shared by many diverse consumers at one time or another.
2. What precisely should they be doing (that they are not doing already and will probably not do if we will not intervene), that would direct them to eventually choose our brand specifically? It is, by the way, the first and only objective of branding. What do they have to do so that your marketing plan will materialize (even before the actual purchase)? Do they have to go somewhere? To call? To agree to meet your salesperson? To stop and pick out your product from the shelf? Which activity, which does not occur today, would lead them in the correct path on the way to buying?
3. What is the sound reason that should motivate them to change their behavioral inertia? How will they benefit from that change? Why would you, in their place, buy what you are offering? You can think of it as your differentiating factor (what makes you differentially better?), or as your competitive advantage (what makes you comparatively better?), according to your preference. What could make their situation better compared to their current standing and to the other options available to them in the market?
4. How exactly will they extract the benefit (that which answers question 3) according to your marketing plan? That is not a repeat question. Notice that the third question dealt with the 'why' of the target consumer's planned motivation, and now, we are trying to understand the 'how' of your marketing plan. How are you planning to provide the benefit defined in the answer to question 3? If, for instance, you said before that you are making something more accessible, easy or comfortable for them, now explain how it will become more accessible, easy or comfortable, due to your product.

Let us look at an example: The introduction of Palm Pilot to the market. O.K.? Just the main points:

1. "Residents" of the business community, gadgets fans, who manage a dynamic, constantly changing schedule, and have not yet embraced the electronic organizers, or were disappointed by them because of their being laborious to update and generally unreliable.
2. ... will step into the nearest office equipment store and ask about the Palm Pilot.
3. ... because at last there is an organizer which is not only sophisticated, small and wonderfully shaped, but is also easily kept up to date and preserves the stored data when damaged or when upgrading to a new model
4. ... because the Palm Pilot can 'converse' with the PC, making the updating process a simple task to perform, as well as enabling creation of backups which could be easily transferred on to the next generations of organizers.

That is what the 'Marketing Scenario' is all about. All you have to do is answer the questions. Be precise. Be thorough. Be honest. Do it in writing. Even if you're absolutely sure that the answers are positively clear to you and there's nothing to be gained. Only when your 'Marketing Scenario' is totally translated to a written text, should you go on and proceed with the brand development process. Otherwise, you will get trapped along the way, and don't say I didn't warn you.