

Luttrell on Leadership
by
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How to Increase Marketing Effectiveness

The term “marketing myopia” was coined because it is so easy for companies to be “near-sighted” about their marketing. You may be nearsighted in the sense that you lack perspective because you are too close to your business. You may tend to view your product or service just from your side of the fence. You may be “in love” with your product/service to the point where you are not able to see it objectively. You may overly identify with how hard you work, how difficult it is to produce, how clever, beautiful, efficient, or unique it is.

On the other hand, some companies under-appreciate their product or service. Being so close to it, you may see that it’s not “perfect” or you may be overly concerned that competitors offer similar products, or perhaps you’re already excited about your next great idea. The lesson here is the vital importance of achieving an arm’s length distance from your service or product so that you can see it objectively. Only when you have an objective understanding and appreciation of your offering can you effectively make strategic decisions about how to market it.

There are a number of ways to gain objectivity. One of the most basic and reliable is getting feedback from your customers or clients. This type of market

research can fall anywhere on the continuum, from formal to informal. There are a variety of methods, from structured interviews and surveys to simply asking your customers for their opinions. The crux of the matter is to determine what type of information you need, the best way to go about getting it, and then following through.

Once you are satisfied with the quality of your information, you have the opportunity to apply insight. The following classic and universal formulas apply particularly well to marketing:

- Information + Insight = Knowledge.
- Knowledge + Experience = Wisdom.
- Wisdom + Imagination = Genius.

And that should be your aspiration in order to develop truly effective marketing strategies. The key is gaining perspective and objectivity through feedback, using the information intelligently, and then adding the spark of creativity and imagination. In a challenging economy, mastering the art of marketing is even more critical to business success.

The story of a fortuitous meeting during a visit to Corrick’s in downtown Santa Rosa offers a great illustration. Corrick’s, a gift and stationery store now in its fourth generation as a family business, was hosting a “signing” of Wilton Armetale serving pieces by Fred Wilton, the

former president of the company and now chairman of the board. I had an opportunity to talk with Mr. Wilton about his company. Wilton Armetale is also a family business, founded as a metal casting company in 1892. Fred's father, Ralph Wilton, created its unique non-toxic, food-safe alloy line of metal serving pieces over 40 years ago when a friend asked him to develop some pieces for his new restaurant in New York. The manufacturing company is located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and has 120 employees.

Mr. Wilton explained that the reason he and his wife, Gay, do these special events is because they have learned that it's the best way to get first hand feedback from customers. As owners, they were so involved with the day-to-day business problems that they had realized the risk of becoming insulated, removed, and losing touch with their customers.

"We sell in three different markets: department stores, big box stores, and independent retailers like Corrick's. We decided to do something special for our independents and to build our business with them, because they have the best connection with our consumers. They take your feedback and understand what your wants and needs are. The independents have so much interest in their customers, in customer service, and consequently, they have customer loyalty. We have great sales reps and they give us a lot of information, but there's no substitute for getting information

first hand. We learn where our customers think we should be going in terms of design and function. We take what we hear and translate that into products. Our deviled-egg serving tray is now one of our best selling pieces, and that suggestion came from a customer. We all have read the books that say stay close to your customer, but you tell yourself you're too busy or that you've heard it before, but if you don't keep your customers happy, you may as well forget it."

Fred Wilton's insights illustrate the value of research, getting out to your customers, talking with them face to face, and listening to what they have to say, as well as taking good care of your valued distributors at the same time. It's a great example of how to minimize marketing myopia. Put on your marketing specs, do your research, and be prepared to look at things in a new way. As Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

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