

MARKETING PERSPECTIVES

In reality, marketing often gets misplaced

Textbooks say many things, and (we hope) most of it is true.

But they can be misleading. Take the nature of modern marketing, for example. Every student seems to acquire an impression that "Once upon a time" it was just selling, or so we are told, but today marketing combines all facets of product, price, distribution, and communications to satisfy consumer needs. Some smaller firms might still just look at marketing in terms of selling, but successful firms practice the marketing concept.

In general, this is often true. Yet a simple fact of business is that marketing often gets "misplaced."

There are many examples of marketers who do not follow the marketing concept. These are companies that make products in terms of what designers or engineers say they can produce. Marketing gets "misplaced" because the product planner did not study how the product or its features could meet consumer needs. For those companies, marketing remains just selling.

Misplaced marketing does not mean a product will fail, especially if all competitors make the same features, but it can make for some unusual perspectives toward consumers.

It is like the bicycle store owner who states that he "knows" his customers, so he never stocks certain products "They're not interested in those kinds of things," he says, though he never tried stocking the products, and he never asked his customers whether they wanted them.

Until recently, some European cars came to our shores in colors that only a European would love. U.S. companies sent all cars to nations that drove on the left with drivers' seats and steering wheels set for our right-sided driving. Everyone has a tale of looking for product with certain features and settling for something short of what they want.

Of course, a product is more than the sum of its physical features, so a good job of sales changes the product itself. And maybe the people that are settling for less are just out of step with the rest of the marketplace.

There might not be enough of them to be considered a viable target mar-

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on
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ket. Still, the times when marketing might be misplaced from its strategic role gives insight into transactions beyond what everyday wisdom presumes.

In addition, some people often feel that marketing is misplaced even when it's properly used. Many politicians, educators, cigarette companies, and other groups do a good job of following the dictates of thorough strategic marketing, though many people might wish that they wouldn't use marketing.

Instead, politicians should be leaders, using marketing theory and practice to, at most, sell their ideas to the public. Colleges and universities need to attract students, but they still need to retain academic integrity. Cultural artifacts should grow from the populace, not be designed as per a marketing strategy, or so we are often told. Certain products should not be efficiently and profitably delivered to "satisfy consumer needs," no company should maximize its profits with these products, and *never* should these products target children as a market segment.

Of course, even misplaced marketing need not necessarily be banned. It could be a source of problems (or at least criticisms of various aspects of marketing practice).

Therein lies the interest from the activities I call misplaced marketing, be it misplaced because it is misused, abused, misapplied, or simply the source of social criticisms. Marketing mistakes from failed products or companies are easy to spot; marketing successes can get almost boring to recite. But misplaced marketing gets to the heart of seeing what marketing is, is not, and what it can be. ■

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