

The battle for marketing's future

Will rationality or intuition prevail?

There is a battle of ideas taking place for marketing's future. The views being expressed seem completely divergent. Is the future a logical one of playing it safe and using quasi-scientific approaches of measurement? Or is it an intuitive one of higher risk, where creativity is the route to manifold rewards?

The debate has echoes of similar ones raging in the fields of economics and strategic management. For strategists, however, there is no time to sit around and see how it works out. The corporate world is littered with deaths of the indecisive and the inert. Decisions need to be taken today and tomorrow for the benefit of the medium- to long-term future of organizations. A side needs to be chosen. So which side are you on?

Choose measurement

In his book *Learning from Winners* Raymond Pettit argues that the "Black Art" era is at an end, pointing to a new age of enlightenment in which whatever the complexity, marketing effectiveness can be measured. There is complexity because marketing activities have never been so inter-related, making it appear difficult to isolate the effect of any one activity. Conversely, there is complexity because there are still barriers between creative, strategic technological and analytical efforts.

The last age of enlightenment changed the world. Will this new enlightenment change marketing? Proposed is a model for measuring the incremental impact of marketing on changing attitudes, behaviors or the business bottom line. Called Longwoods Quadrant map, or LQ Map, after the consultancy where Pettit is vice president, it provides a framework for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the various tools used to measure marketing effectiveness. Namely:

- *Level one - description* – often descriptive tools are wrongly used to predict sales.
- *Level two - interpretation* – seeking to measure and observe customers' intent, tendencies or behavior, but results-to-action are often a problem.
- *Level three - explanation* – a dynamic, actionable and understandable guide to evaluating the drivers of marketing impact.
- *Level four - prediction* – the gathering of converging evidence to examine return on investment of marketing spend, and provide the basis to create, plan and manage marketing and communications campaigns.

The goal is to drive forward marketing through efficient spending generating effective outcomes. The method is to identify the metrics that matter. By measuring and analyzing on four levels, it is argued that accuracy emerges and weaknesses of various tools and measuring systems become filtered out. It is marketing as science.

Choose creativity

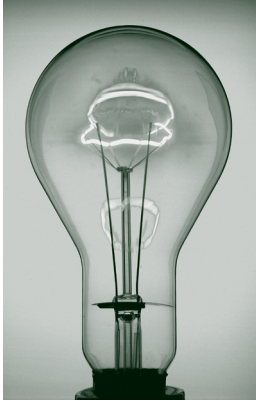
Marketing as art, although not necessarily a dark art, is the essence of a counterview argued elegantly by Bruce Tait in a plea for a focus on creativity in *Admap*. Science appears compelling, particularly in corporate boardroom battles where intuition proves to be a poor defense against the logisticians armed with financial projections and armfuls of hard data. Tait debunks the myth that “if something is important it deserves to be treated in a scientific manner.”

He argues that “the scientific approach” leads to “me too” strategies and blandness, when distinctiveness rules. Witness, for example, US retailer target combining the concepts of “chic” and “cheap” to devastating effect. Contrast it with scientific approaches that haven’t reduced the number of marketing flops, despite the comfort they may have given to timid decision makers.

In intelligence gathering, for example, scientific methods have been debunked by the failures of America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Iraq and more broadly. Science’s replacement of old school intuition has been disastrous, and it shows. Yet marketers rush towards measuring the numbers.

What gets lost in the shuffle is creativity. The risk assessment that is key to strategy creation can simply kill it. MBA’s that teach that “if you can’t measure it you can’t manage it” oversimplify human complexity. The secret to tomorrow’s success is to integrate creative thinking into analysis. It doesn’t need to be less thoughtful, but it does need to be bold. Building a brand, or being successful in marketing, is based upon tuning in to the human mind, more often than not an emotional rather than logical domain.

In old-fashioned terms we need people that understand people.



Embrace your customers

As in contemporary politics, could there be a third way? Maybe the protagonists aren’t as far apart as they first appear. Customer advisory boards (CABs) perhaps fall into the category of qualitative science, but powerful medicine they remain, and their popularity is growing. Simply get your biggest customers together and ask them what they want. Marketing does, at the end of the day, begin with simply understanding customers’ wants, needs and demands.

There are many questions company’s need answers to, possibly:

- How can we increase the success of our product launches?
- How can our investments yield more sales?
- What’s the next big thing in the industry?
- How can we increase client retention rates?

Dave Schrader, marketing director of Ohio-based NCR Corporation believes that CABs will make their technology products more useful for customers. Oil and gas industry provider Halliburton have found them to break down barriers between customers and suppliers, enabling strategic solutions to be found. Reynolds & Reynolds, suppliers of non-vehicle products to automotive dealers in the USA have utilized the process extensively in their new product development efforts. The secrets to the process are:

- *Discover* – secure and align executive stakeholders.
- *Define* – establish a clear mission.
- *Design* – recruit qualified members.
- *Deliver* – take action based upon CAB outcomes.

Then enjoy the benefits of embedding the voice of the customer in your organization.

“Simply get your biggest customers together and ask them what they want. Marketing does, at the end of the day, begin with simply understanding customers’ wants, needs and demands.”

Science or art?

Three disparate futures are considered here but are they mutually exclusive? It would certainly appear not. In the age of enlightenment art and science were not separate disciplines but interrelated views of life, spirituality and the universe. It was much, much later that divisions were created and false choices between the two were made.

The scientific approaches cry out for the application of a creative mind. The creative approach seeks to embed creativity within an analytical framework. And customer advisory panels are just plain, old-fashioned common sense.

It isn't a choice between science and art. Marketing has come of age. It has been a painful journey of division. But the future is holistic – western scientific medicine with a strong dose of alternative herbal magic.

Comment

This multiple review article is based upon the following papers.

“Biggest bang for the buck: new frameworks for accountability in marketing, advertising and communications” by Raymond Pettit in the *Ivey Business Journal* is clearly a positioning paper for a marketing consultancy, yet the arguments are put well, and the model seems a sensible one.

“The strategist’s greatest weapon” by Bruce Tait in *Admap* is a viewpoint article that makes a powerful case for businesses not to lose sight of creativity and intuition. There are shades of Henry Mintzberg’s impassioned pleas to strategic planners.

“Connecting to customers” by Geehan and Sheldon in *Marketing Management* is a practical article, combining industry views with how to do it advice.

References

Geehan, S. and Sheldon, S. (2005), “Connecting to customers”, *Marketing Management*, Vol. 14 No. 6, pp. 37-42, ISSN 1061-3846.

Pettit, R. (2005), “Biggest bang for the buck: New frameworks for accountability in marketing, advertising and communications”, *Ivey Business Journal*, November/December, pp. 1-7, ISSN 1481-8248.

Tait, B. (2005), “The strategist’s greatest weapon”, *Admap*, Vol. 40 No. 466, pp. 21-3, ISSN 0001-8295.

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