

# Ethical issues in marketing



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

**Introduction**

Marketing is more than just the advertising side of sales. The true idea of marketing encompasses “ creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers...that benefit the organization and its stakeholders” (Solomon, Marshall, Stuart 9). This value is in the eye of the consumer and can vary dramatically. Basic “ buyer beware” methods are taught as early as middle school in an effort to educate people of the different tactics used to guide wants, which are based on cultural and social influences (Solomon, Marshall, Stuart 10). Even with this education, marketers are able to create needs within consumers, and while there are plenty of unethical ways of doing so, the basic concept of creating needs is ethical and provides consumers with benefits while ensuring an organization’s lasting success (Solomon, Marshall, and Stuart 9).

In marketing terms, a “ need is the difference between a consumer’s actual state and some desired state.” (Solomon, Marsh, Stuart, 9). Marketers create this need by showing consumers the benefits of their product, and consumers in turn assign value to having the product and have a reason to purchase it. Consider the need of cleaning up spills. A norm is created by society to not live in filth. There are many different ways to achieve the transition from a mess (actual state) to no mess (desired state). Brawny suggests the need for the “ quicker picker upper” in order to give consumers the benefit of achieving their goal more quickly and efficiently. Further value is added through the ability to use less product. Another example is Axe for men. They have a product line that includes deodorants, body sprays, and shampoos. Their marketing creates a need for men to buy their product in

order to conform to another of society's norms of being clean. Axe, however, goes further in suggesting men should use their product to attract women. Although men may not need Axe specifically, marketing is able to convince them, on a psychological level, they need to smell a certain way to attract beautiful women.

### **Summary**

While there are opportunities for marketers to use unethical strategies, as long as products perform and deliver as they say they will, there is nothing unethical about creating needs. For example, people with Chronic Pulmonary Obstructive Disease may not know they have a myriad of options out there for their condition. Is it unethical to have advertisements on television to create awareness of these products that could help them lead a better life? Absolutely not. Their desired state is to be able to breathe easier and by getting information from marketers, they can then ask their doctor if this medication may help them. The consumer is happy because they have a possible new weapon in their fight against a disease and the company is happy because they are building brand awareness and selling their products. Without selling their products, the company would cease to exist in the market.

The skin care industry is a booming business right now. Youth and beauty are held in a high regard in our society today. Marketers know that by advertising items such as wrinkle reducers and skin creams that promote vitality and youth that people are going to buy these products. They tap into people's insecurities, vanity, and subconscious by using before and after pictures, pictures of beautiful women or men and testimonials from people

who have used their products. On some psychological level, many women and some men will find a need for these products whether to undo past harm or as a preventative. While this in itself is ethical, marketers have to be careful not to tout products that do not deliver the results that they claim. When this type of marketing takes place it is deceptive and then the practice becomes unethical.

Marketers create needs by generating value in products and services leading to a difference between people's actual and desired state. This difference can be psychological, such as self confidence with Axe or tangible such as Brawny quickly picking up messes. This practice is ethical because, in many cases, the marketer is helping to raise awareness to the consumer about products they may not have heard of or sharing a benefit that will make the consumer's life more efficient. Marketing serves as a way to satisfy consumers while also allowing organizations to thrive in a capitalistic economy.