

Role of marketing staff

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



The Role of the Marketing Staff DONALD R. LONGMAN Business management

[S increasingly dependent upon marketing to gain enduring competitive advantage. This article describes the rich opportunities for success presented by a change in the approach to marketing staff work and acquisition of professional personnel for it. GREAT DEAL has been written in recent years about the marketing concept. We may expect to see much more; for competition in American industry is increasingly centered in marketing-. This is a substantial change from the situation only a few decades ago.

Success then hung on creative skill in evolving substantially new types of products, new production processes, new efficiency systems. Each step forward in these areas produced relatively strong and enduring competitive advantages. This is much less true today. Mass training of skilled research and development men and of production engineers, increased mobility of manpower, and mass communication at the professional level have all served to spread technological know-how with amazing speed. Competitors employ research men and engineers of parallel training, professional contact, and skill.

If one company's team seems relatively inept in the competitive battle, it is still possible to call upon a superior group of consulting engineers for help while a new team is being built. Under these conditions, competitors quickly identify and match successful innovations made by any company in their field. They may even improve on the original innovator's ideas. It would be vain to suppose that even such corporate giants as Esso, U. S. Steel, or ^

General Motors could gain and hold for long a major competitive advantage in product or manufacturing process.

Indeed, it has become common practice to grant licenses to competitors on a royalty basis, thus removing technical innovations as a basis of competitive advantage in the market. Competitive Opportunities It[^] is this comparative equality in production skills that is forcing a shift in the weight of competition to marketing. Marketing is still a relatively unexplored area. Our customers are so many, so scattered, and so nonhomogeneous in nature and in demands that they are difficult to understand. We are not even sure how we can best serve them economically and efficiently.

Changes are still commonplace among big, well-established companies in such basic elements as channels of distribution, discount systems, warehousing arrangements, and service policies. Such changes grow as much out of uncertainty and insecurity in marketing decision as out of changes in the market itself or in marketing institutions. Marketing offers a rich area of opportunity for competitive advantage, richer today than that offered by any other phase of business. But if a company is to seize this opportunity, a lot has to be done. 29 30 Journal of Marketing, July, 1962
Requirements for Efficient Marketing 1.

A Sound Understanding of the Market First, it is essential to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the market itself. This is a matter of getting the facts, completely and accurately. One has to know the exact size of the market and its geographical distribution. One must know who make up the market, the numbers and kinds of people. Where do they buy, in what

quantities, how often, why? What products are available for them to choose among? What are their characteristics, their prices, their patterns of distribution? What are the products used for, what satisfactions do they provide? Why is one brand chosen over another; and why do people change in their choices? There is so much that needs to be known, and known well. How else can we think constructively of the marketing process until we have a solid grasp of the facts, a sure sense of perspective? The truth is that little effort to think constructively about marketing was made during the decades when competitive success was established by production efforts. Systematic collection and analysis of marketing facts have been undertaken, even by the largest and most progressive companies, only during the last fifteen or twenty years. Indeed, the evolution of marketing, research may serve as an index of the shift in competitive pressure toward marketing. We possess today the tools and techniques for acquiring quickly and efficiently almost all the basic data necessary to provide executives with a sound perspective in marketing. Yet marketing research is still inadequately utilized; there is ample room even now for a company to gain major marketing advantages over competitors simply by superior knowledge of the facts of the business. The 10,000 professional marketing research men today are probably not a third of the number we may expect when marketing has been developed to a peak of efficiency comparable to production.

2. Innovation The second requisite to superior marketing lies in innovation. There is no progress in acceptance of routine, in copying competitive practices, in turgid operation. Indeed, in the fluid environment of marketing, with changes in policies, practices, and procedures borne no more of creative thought than of

uncertainty, the well thought out, tested innovations may prove extremely rewarding. We must be prepared to consider alterations, often radical changes, in methods and policies. We must become creative, cultivating a flexibility of mind that seeks and considers new approaches. We must be prepared to reexamine the basic premises upon which our policies rest. We must begin to ask the fundamental questions and to fix them in our mind, looking, looking always for new answers. There exists a unit expected to devise and explore new ideas in the production area. It is supposed to suggest innovations, to challenge current practices. It is staffed with men of imagination, men of specialized education, men whose minds are constantly stirred and challenged by contacts with basic research scientists in our universities, foundations, and government units. They are in continuous contact with other professionals throughout the country, often in other countries, and are constantly stimulated by the ideas and exploratory efforts they encounter in a wide variety of industries. They are Research and Development men. There is no comparable unit in marketing, even in companies whose marketing costs far exceed manufacturing costs. The nearest marketing parallel is to be found in advertising agencies. These owe their independent existence to the very fact that creative imagination and innovation are obviously essential to advertising; and even the largest advertisers do not provide in their marketing organizations a climate conducive to high quality creative work. But the advertising agency is concerned fundamentally with only one of many marketing activities. It is not well equipped to serve as the creative arm for the entire marketing function. It is not paid enough to do the job; nor is the company advertising manager

who works with the agency so positioned in his own company that he could spark the creative effort for the entire Marketing Department. This means that a new and different unit is needed to function within the company itself. It must be staffed with men of creative minds, trained in seeing and exploring possibilities not clear to others. They need to be observers of marketing in all of industry, stirred and challenged by professional association with creative men in universities, consulting firms, everywhere that pioneering thought goes on. They must imagine, synthesize ideas, experiment systematically. They may be engineers exploring the application of operations research to warehousing. They may be psychologists studying the foundations of sales- •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR. Donald Longman is Vice President and Director of Research for the J. Walter Thompson Company, New York. He is President of the American Marketing Association and Chairman of the International Marketing Federation. In earlier years Dr. Longman was a university professor and a government executive. He has held senior positions in business in both line and staff capacities. He is the author of a number of books and articles. The Role of the Marketing Staff 31 men's or dealers' morale and motivation. They may be marketing researchers probing ways to break old consumer buying habits and build new ones. They may be systematically testing consumer responses to a range of product styles, flavors, or scents. They must be the Marketing R and D. . Scientific Approach to Decision Making The third major requisite to superior marketing lies in hard-headed, scientific decision making. This requires a solid grasp of the facts of a business through research and through experience. More important, it requires imagination, perceptiveness, thoroughness, objectivity,

analytical skill, and emotional stability. Few people acquire all these traits in the normal course of their lives; our marketing executives today introduce large portions of emotion, hunch, habit, and haste in their judgments. But needed qualities can be developed as a matter of explicit training.

In increasing measure they are being developed in the best of our Schools of Business. Decision making is extraordinarily complex in the marketing field. When decision is required between alternative policies or procedures, it is necessary first to grasp fully and completely the exact nature of the alternatives and all their implications. It may seem simple, for example, to select a brand name for a new product; but this is only true for one who does not know both the values and dangers in a name. A name can convey a sense of quality, lend itself to easy recall, facilitate effective advertising, express values to be received in use; in sum, it can secure a privileged competitive position to its owner. Or it can be easily ridiculed or played upon, fail of copyright, be subject to confusion with other names, and so on. In truth, there are scores of facts to consider in selecting names, a wide variety of criteria to employ in judgment. There is a lot at stake. If this is true of names, imagine how much more true this is of issues concerning pricing, packaging, discount systems, employment and motivation of salesmen, advertising themes, and so on and on. Each issue must be studied objectively, its implications uncovered. All the facts relevant to decision must be marshalled. The possible effects of alternative courses must be weighed. Experimentation or testing may be considered. This is the slow, arduous, but hard-headed and scientific approach to decision making. This is the way to confident action, desirable any time but mandatory when significantly new,

creative innovations are put into effect. Those of us privileged to have close contact with marketing management over the past twenty years have seen a slow but steady progress toward this kind of decision making. Arbitrary, hasty, "seat-of-the-pants" decisions based on hunch, enthusiasm, and personal preference for the individual advocates of one course are becoming less common. Yet there remains much room for improvement in decision making today.

4. Efficient Administration The fourth requisite to marketing success lies in efficient administration—the daily execution of policy and practice, the employment of facilities and men, the operating job. This is the field of marketing performance, so obviously necessary that it could not be overlooked. Here the need is for inspiring leadership of men, operating drive, astute supervision of performance in every detail, the building and maintenance of a morale that instills a motivation in the doers of the marketing job. Broadly speaking, marketing can claim credit for superior performance in this area; it has been given thought and attention at a senior business management level. By the same token, it is the marketing requisite least rich in opportunities for improvement and, therefore, least likely to yield a competitive advantage in marketing. The very obviousness of the need for sound administration has tended to obscure the need for the other three basic requisites in marketing—a full understanding of the market itself; the development of creative, new ideas or innovations; the making of decisions on a hard-headed, scientific basis. Administration is a big job, involving the employment and supervision of hundreds, even thousands, of people, as well as the purchase, maintenance, and operation of equipment and facilities of countless kinds. And the huge expenditures for marketing lie

under the administrator's control. Small wonder, then, that marketing administration was equated with all of marketing, until increasing competitive equality in other areas forced people to study more seriously the nature of the marketing function.

Sound administration is a fundamental component of marketing, but is far from all of it. It is the operation of a gigantic " machine. " This marketing machine works on the materials provided it, and under the policies and procedures set for it. The machine operator, skilled as he may be in his function, is rarely qualified alone to conceive, test, and decide upon new ideas, on new policies and procedures. He is not an innovator. He is not a researcher. He is not a trained and objective decision maker. These are different problems, requiring skills and training different from his, perhaps even a different temperament.

A New Organization of the Marketing Function The slowly growing recognition that marketing management requires much more than administrative skill has led our largest and most progressive companies to bring a new kind of man to the Marketing Vice Presidency. He tends to be more thoughtful, sometimes skilled more in handling ideas than in handling men. He is more objective, analytical, less emotionally involved in his assignment. He has begun demanding research—searching for ideas, thinking of both " strategy and tactics. " The basic administrative management of marketing, the line operating responsibility, is being delegated to a subordinate General Sales Manager or Director of Field Sales Activities. Concurrently, staff departments

in marketing have grown in number and influence. New units have appeared. We now have Product Managers, Marketing Operations Managers, Research Managers, along with the older Advertising and Credit Managers. Even Marketing Accounting and Marketing Personnel Managers may serve as members of the Marketing Staff. Functions and Operation of the Marketing Staff The functions of these several staff groups have not been clearly crystallized as yet.

Broadly speaking, most of them are supposed to study all phases of the company's marketing operations in the area of their specialization; keep the Marketing Vice President closely posted on trends and developments in their areas; check performance efficiency; and recommend policy or procedure changes when they seem needed. Thus, the Product Manager for a particular product keeps closely informed on all competitive conditions affecting his product, observes regional and district sales performance on the product, notes obstacles to sales success, and proposes means of overcoming them. The Operations Manager concerns himself with the supply, maintenance, and efficient performance of all physical facilities, stores, warehouses, delivery systems, etc. As a superior specialist in this area, he advises the Marketing Vice President on ways to improve efficiency and service, and to cut operating costs. The same kind of work is done by the Credit Manager, the Marketing Accounting and Personnel Managers, and the Advertising and Sales Promotion Manager. Collectively, the staff managers cover all the different functions in marketing. When these Departments were set up, it was natural, of course, to staff them with young men who had proved themselves successful in the company's marketing activities. So, they were

drawn from the ranks of the administrators. Generally this is still true, for this is the logical source of men and these jobs are still not clearly enough defined to suggest the need to look elsewhere. But this will change, indeed is in the process of change. It is not enough for the Product Manager or Operations Manager to serve as an observer of operations, to be an administrative second-guesser in a particular area of specialty. This would be a most routine approach to a job, unworthy of senior personnel.

Rather, the staff Manager and his assistants must use their advantageous positions to acquire all relevant information affecting their functions. They must assimilate, analyze, and evaluate these data constructively. They must add to this, the stimulus of wide-ranging contact and observation of their industry and of many others. They must cultivate a flexibility of mind inviting new ideas. They must become creative—considering all manner of policies, procedures, activities which can add to marketing opportunities or improve service and increase efficiency. They must develop and explore their creative ideas, testing mentally or in the market place those which seem most promising. In handling such tasks, they develop habits of thoroughness and objectivity, making scores of decisions on the basis of a scientific approach. They are truly staff experts—observing, creating, testing, recommending ways of doing their part of the marketing job better than it has been done before. This is the basic job of the Product Manager.

Concentrating all energies on the one product or product line for which he bears responsibility, it is his job to conceive new and better ways to market it. His work may lead to recommended product modifications, package changes, price or distribution revisions. He may study advertising,

promotion, guarantees, and service, and come up with new recommendations. He is the innovator, the preliminary decision maker, working from intimate knowledge of all relevant facts. The same is true of the Marketing Operations Manager. He is studying the nature and design of his retail outlets, the number and location of warehouses, the packing and order-filling system, the volume and distribution of inventories. He has scores of subjects to study, each offering opportunities for significant improvement. If he can only conceive a better type of retailing equipment for his stores, a better system of truck scheduling, a finer system of production-distribution coordination, he can strengthen his company's competitive position and add to its profits, just as can the Research and Development Manager or the Production Manager. What is true of Product and Operations Managers is just as true of the Advertising, Sales Promotion, and Public Relations Managers. It is just as true of the Marketing Personnel Manager. By use of cost analysis, the Marketing Accounting Manager can make significant contributions to policy on areas of operation, channels of distribution, a quantity discount system, and a hundred other things. We need an explicit, articulated understanding that this is the job of the Staff Manager. We need The Role of the Marketing Staff 33 to recognize formally, and affirmatively that innovation and scientific decision making is the particular province of these men . . . that collectively they represent a kind of R and D for Marketing. The Staff as Professionals When this is done, we will have a very different set of specifications for men to fill these jobs. They must possess keenly analytical but highly flexible minds.

They must be imaginative, creative. They must be objective, thorough, trained in the scientific approach to problems. They must know the rudiments of collection, assimilation, and evaluation of data. They must be well informed, with wide contacts in industry and education. In a word, they must be professionals. Broadly speaking, this is the kind of background and training we find most often today in marketing research men and consultants. This implies that in time most senior staff positions in marketing will be research positions. After all, research, viewed broadly, is nothing more than the systematic, thorough, objective examination of a problem; the orderly acquisition of all relevant data bearing upon it; and the meaningful, creative evaluation of the data in terms of conclusions and recommendations. This is, indeed, what is expected of Marketing Staff Managers. With further passage of time, however, the specific functions of marketing research will be narrowed. Today anyone engaged in simple fact gathering may be called a research man. Ten years from now, however, the term probably will be reserved largely for those who by long, and specialized training have mastered the more complex and intricate techniques of research. They will be the specialists in sampling, in operations research, in projective techniques. The Marketing Research Department will not be large, and it will carry out its work on a service basis for all the Marketing Staff Managers. The changes ahead are already very much in the process of being made. Product Managers, Advertising Managers, staff men of every kind are addressing themselves ever more seriously to their jobs, going farther and farther beyond routine, specialized, administrative observation and suggestion. They are getting into their jobs more deeply than ever, and so they feel impelled to

creative and decision making roles. And more and more such jobs are going to research men and to men whose training and temperament commend them for a research approach to business. The trend will quicken as there is more widespread specific recognition and articulation of the ultimate character of staff work. MARKETING MEMO We Are Already Living in the Future . . . ^ Are you enjoying your life in 1985? Through no time machine, via no crystal ball, we are, today, living lives accurately predicted by earlyscienceforecasters and science fictioneers—but predicted for about 1985.

Our age is a good quarter of a century ahead of its time, thanks to developments that would have waited many more years—except for urgent military necessity. Many of us resent defense spending. We begrudge its existence as a necessary waste that helps insure freedom, but yields no tangible return. How wrong we are! Our defense research dollars, aimed at strengthening our military muscle, are pushing civilians toward richer, healthier, safer, more convenient living. It was militarymoneythat led to the development of the safety door lock and the low-profile anti-skid tires now on many new automobiles.

Military necessity mothered rainwear that remains indefinitely repellent to water, oil, and grease despite repeated laundering and dry cleaning. ^John G. Hubbell, "Life in 11)85 Today," reprinted by permission of Quest . . . for tomorrow Magazine, Vol. 2 (Summer, 1961), p. 14. Copyright of Journal of Marketing is the property of American Marketing Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without

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