

The marketing communication process



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The marketing communication process represents varied disciplines and tools that are composed of five elements (Finne and Gronroos, 2009). These represent advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations. The above were examined and explored in this discussion where each was found to have individual and specialised use and contribution to the marketing communication process. The process is an interdependent series of marketing efforts that require companies and marketers to take stock of the attributes and shortcomings of their product or service to construct a plan that achieves successful outcomes.

The application of the marketing communication process is not a dogmatic discipline, but rather one that requires an understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each component. This provides the basis for understanding how components can work together to address differing product and service demands.

Understanding Marketing Communication and Advertising

The mass media benefits of advertising is a key component as it offers the means to reach and influence the broadest cross section of consumers in a highly cost effective manner (Gilbody et al, 2005). The mediums employed represent television, broadcast, print and online techniques along with billboards, signs, posters and other forms that put the product message in front of the public. One of the challenges is waste and targeting. The mass media approach means that whilst the ad placements can be positioned to meet certain demographic and psychological aspects of the target audience, the imprecise approaches of television, broadcast and varied print mediums means that the advertising efforts will be either seen by non-target profiles

or potentially lost in a sea of what is termed as advertising clutter (Rotfeld, 2006).

Advertising clutter is defined as a large amount of advertising messages that bombard a consumer during television programs, the pages of magazines or in other print or broadcast mediums (Rotfeld, 2006). The number of ads tends to cause consumers to either ignore these efforts or to tune them out unless the creativity used in the messages specially appeals to a consumer need (Fill, 2005).

The above are distinct challenges faced by marketers in the use of advertising that are highly difficult and complex to execute. Whilst consumers can be classified and grouped into general categories, the differing stages represented by their decision making process in terms of readiness and intent to purchase poses additional hurdles faced by using mass media advertising (Chan et al, 2009). Frequency and repetitiveness represent the general tool used to address the above, however, depending on the medium used, such as television and magazines, these measures (frequency) can be highly expensive (Kelly and Jugenheimer, 2008; Fill, 2005).

Overcoming the above costs aspects as well as clutter and the tendency to ignore ads represents a distinct challenge for marketers. The solution lies in crafting a mixture of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations that provide enough frequency and exposure to counteract the indicated clutter and tendency to ignore ads, whilst meeting the dictates of a cost effective budget.

Contribution of Personal Selling to Marketing Communications

Depending on the nature of the business, the products being offered and the size of the company, personal selling can represent either an efficient or highly costly mode of marketing communication (Baker and Hart, 2008).

Whilst in most cases the sales personal are paid by commission, the percentage of the sale that needs to be devoted to this approach has to be high enough to induce top flight personnel to participate (Ross et al, 2005).

The potential to sell enough units to enable them to earn a good wage is a critical factor in attracting better qualified individuals (Ross et al, 2005).

More importantly, the product has to be suited to this type of approach.

Other challenges include being able to develop suitable potential sales prospects that represent lead generation created by advertising, offers, website visits, promotions and in some cases cold canvassing techniques (Smith et al, 2006). The challenges are to reduce the per unit sales expense low enough to justify its use and the payment of commissions. In terms of an example of the above, this means that the item must be highly suited for direct selling. Insurance, brokerage services, real estate and cars are prime examples (Hendershott and Zhang, 2006). This is due to the complexity of choices in terms of product types where explaining and establishing a rapport with the consumer is a key part of the process (Hendershott and Zhang, 2006; Fill, 2005). The built in margins in these products and services is high enough to absorb the commission and sales administration costs that include hiring better quality personnel.

As pointed, personal selling, in lieu of mass product distribution in stores, chains or using the Internet is not suited to many types of products or services. Typically, companies such as electronics (computers, home appliances, banking and other products or services) utilise amended customer service call in centres where operators are trained to refer customer to a sales department when it is discovered a new or replacement product is either needed or desired (Piercy and Rich, 2009). This is a form of personal selling that is organised as part of normal business functions, in order to aid in generating sales whilst keeping costs low. As is the case with the marketing communications process, in order to address the varied challenges faced by targeting and reaching the right prospects in a cost effective manner, a combination of various segments of the five marketing communications process elements needs to be used that suits the individual situations, products and other aspects of each company. Apple is a key example of a company that uses all forms of the five elements in conjunction with personal selling that consists of the Apple Store outlets, service and the Internet (Muñiz and Schau, 2007). It also utilises varied forms of sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations in a multi-pronged effort to reach as broad a potential audience combined with frequency and exposure to create the conditions to generate sales (Shimp and Andrews, 2013). This is an example also employed by automotive and other companies (insurance, banking, etc.).

Benefits of Sales Promotion in Marketing Communications

This is a form that in most cases uses purchase incentives to lure customers to buy based on varied reasons (Gronroos, 2004). It can be seen in

supermarkets where varied products and produce carry two for one offers to generate sales using savings as the lure. Other inducements represent discounts during off seasonality buying lows such as January for cars, or May and June price discounts for computer equipment that usually spikes in August, as part of back to school specials (Alawadi et al, 2006). Basically, all companies use some form of sales promotion to generate sales based on seasonality or competitive factors that are used in conjunction with other marketing communication processes.

The key challenge that marketers face in terms of the use of this method is not devalue the perceived worth of their products by using too many sales promotions that customers are quick to see as efforts to gain sales (Alawadi et al, 2006). Apple is a prime example of a company that makes limited use of sales promotions, and when they do, it primarily consists of adding additional memory or other features as part of the normal sales price (Muñiz and Schau, 2007). Apple has maintained a high price point for its products by avoiding sales promotions that offer price discounts. The automotive discount wars of the late 1990 and early 2000 showed automotive companies that discounting prices actually hinder bottom line revenues (Baily et al, 2005).

Uses of Direct Marketing in Marketing Communication

This process represents one that includes mailing special offers and inducements to customers and target audiences that are an important generator of sales (Fill, 2005). Huge customer relationship data bases are compiled using point of sale information from dealers and stores, Internet sale websites, customer service intake calls and other methods (Tapp. 2008).

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It aids in understanding purchase patterns, demographics, and frequency of purchase that are used to put together special mailings. Insurance companies, banks, supermarket chains and many service type industries make extensive use of this method. Today's electronic mediums such as the Internet, and smartphones have expanded the effectiveness and efficiency of direct marketing (Persaud and Azhar, 2012).

The challenge that marketers face today is that the compiling of these customer relationship databases, along with purchase and contact records has become common practice for large firms (Neslin et al, 2006). The increased competitiveness of firms within varied industry classifications, along with new affordable database software and storage systems means this field of marketing communications has undergone a transformation process (Wilson, 2011). This means that mid-sized and smaller forms are able to effectively use the sales generation benefits of direct marketing in their overall efforts. The new challenge thus represents the creative crafting of customised approaches using printed materials (mail) and electronic distribution devised to appeal to customers and target audience using more specialised parameters (Palmer and Loenig-Lewis, 2009). Knowing when customers might seek to replace a product or upgrade their insurance, are keys to effectiveness under direct marketing that helps to generate leads and inquiries.

The challenge that faces marketers is knowing how and when to prospect for sales and customers to induce them to take action, and purchase. The modern interconnected nature of physical locations, Internet websites, emails, online customer service and other areas represents a highly

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proactive customer environment for every phase of the direct marketing experience (Palmer and Loenig-Lewis, 2009). The understanding of the increased immediacy in reaching and providing consumers ways to receive, or get answers to questions is key to all of the marketing communication process mentioned herein.

How Public Relations Contribute to the Marketing Communications Process

This represents an underutilised form for most firms as they fail to understand the importance of keeping the public informed of developments (Krimsky, 2007). The Internet age has given rise to increased scrutiny concerning all aspects of company operations, products and shortcomings (Krimsky, 2007). Curtin and Gaither (2009) define public relations as the process of supplying stakeholders and the general public with information regarding its operations. However, in today's information age, company's face new challenges represented by the increased availability of positive and negative comments by bloggers, product reviewers, and comparative product sites (Droge et al, 2009). The avenue to address these areas represents public relations releases in print, the Internet along with video chats, video conferences and other means highly successful marketing companies such as Apple use public relations to introduce new product innovations, releases, information on upcoming developments and other aspects of operations and products to keep the company's name and activities in front of the public (Cornelissen, 2014). The challenge faced by marketers is to take advantage of the climate for increased information consumers crave, use this as a positive vehicle that works in consort with

other marketing communications processes. This approach represents a highly sophisticated and coordinated approach that looks at marketing communications as a whole, as opposed to piece meal operations.

Subject Conclusions

Whilst it is convenient to think of the marketing communication process in terms of large companies, this does not necessarily provide the needed examples to understand the best approaches. There are countless examples of large companies that have spent huge sums on marketing, only to be out manoeuvred by smaller companies that established a more focused and connected approach to engage consumers.

The main message that was uncovered throughout this examination is that each potential to communicate with the public represents a selling opportunity using the most cost effective and attention getting means available. Today's Internet and varied approaches to aid in the coordination of advertising (using Internet banner ads), personal selling (using customer service), sales promotion, direct marketing (using email and mobile technologies, along with carefully crafted public relations are examples. The hallmark of successful marketing communications is a consistent theme and message delivery that utilises all of the processes. The challenge faced by marketers is not the size of budgets, but how to obtain maximum exposure, message delivery and consistency that combats competitive efforts and strikes an accord with consumers. This entails the use of all of the processes using memorable messages that consumers can connect and relate to, and then delivering on these promises.

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