



Basic Principles of Marketing Communications Strategy

If you read no other chapter in this book, read this one. You can have all the marketing tools and knowledge in the world, but if you have the wrong beliefs about how marketing works, how human beings work, or what to expect, you will likely make all the classic errors.

Marketing is an unnatural act.

It is unnatural and painful to suspend your core beliefs about reality and look at the world through the eyes of another with complete acceptance. It is unnatural and disturbing to become conscious of your own and others' deep subconscious motives. It is unnatural to deviate from what is known and professional and considered prudent and safe, especially if it is what your competitors are all doing. It is unnatural and kind of frightening to acknowledge that the target market has more power than your entire corporation. What they want to hear is more important than what you want to say.

But if you develop the capacity to engage in the unnatural act of marketing, you will be rewarded with more success. Paradoxically, by acknowledging the limits of your power and your perspective, you will gain the ability to have greater influence over your target audience.

The following principles are a combination of beliefs and practices



DON'T DRINK THE CORPORATE KOOL-AID®

Often, in corporate meetings, especially those involving high-level, highly accomplished, highly educated executives, there is the unspoken assumption that through knowledge, discipline, and prudence you can control the behavior of your customers, much as you control finances or personnel or product engineering. But a mere nanosecond of subconscious decision making from the customers, whoever they may be, can collectively bring a high-powered corporation to its knees. Ultimately, everyone in your company reports to your customers' collective subconscious.

that have been proven to increase your chances of success. It's all about your point of view.

Principle One: Marketing is About Probabilities, Not Predictability

Human behavior is always a percentage, not an absolute. You cannot always count on human beings to do what you expect. This is because people have free will, they behave differently in different situations, and situations change unpredictably. There are even individuals whose primary motive in life is to resist authority and diverge from group expectations.

It is very possible to know what has worked in the past, if you measure results. And it is likely that what has worked in the past will

work today or in the future, but there are no guarantees. In general, the larger the group of people studied and the longer the behavior has persisted, the more dependable the prediction.

The smart marketer knows that marketing is always an investment in a future with multiple variables, many of which cannot be controlled. And it is an investment with an



MARKETING IS AN UNNATURAL ACT

The savviest marketers regularly force themselves to step outside their own nature and look at the world through the eyes and hearts and bodies of their customers. This involves temporarily suspending your fundamental beliefs about the world and accepting uncritically the beliefs and perceptions of your target audience, even if you disagree with them. This is hard to do at first, but you can develop this ability with practice.

uncertain return. It is possible to reduce the degree of uncertainty, but it is never possible to eliminate risk altogether. The smart marketer keeps this risk in mind with each decision.

Principle Two: When You Dance with the Customers, Let Them Lead

If customers want to buy red shoes, but you try to sell them white shoes because you have a lot of white shoes in inventory, you are not likely to succeed. Yet companies consistently try to impose their products and messages on their target markets. Why?

One of the reasons people rise to the top of corporations is because they have an above-average need for power and control. They like to make a dent in the world, and they find it deeply satisfying to see their impact on people and numbers. So it is hard for them to step aside and cede control to the customers. The next time you draw your organizational chart, put your customers at the top, above the president. In a way, everyone reports to the customers.

One way to let your customers lead is through market research. If you think of marketing communications as a conversation with your customers, then research is the part where you listen to what they like and don't like and your product and communications are the part where you get to talk. If you're smart, your product and communications will be strongly influenced by what the people in your target market have to say.

Principle Three: Integrate and Align Everything

Customers love consistency. They love knowing that the promises you made yesterday will be consistently kept today and tomorrow. They love the simplicity of knowing that what you stand for today is what you will stand for tomorrow. They love finding brands they can trust to deliver on what they expect.

Therefore, you should integrate everything. Integrate your product, price, promotion, and locations. Integrate your marketing promises and your product and service delivery. Integrate the messages you send out in every medium from every person in your company. Integrate the type of people that you hire. Integrate your positioning, branding, and messaging.

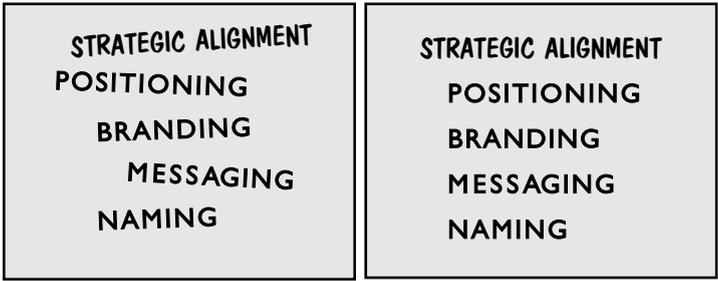


Figure 4-1. Out of and in strategic alignment

If you're the safe car brand, don't sell a convertible or sponsor a racecar or make fun of playing it safe. Integrate your design look, your slogan, your imagery, and the tone and manner or personality of your communications. Make sure everyone is singing from the same program. The term for this integration is *strategic alignment* (Figure 4-1).

Do your many strategies compete with each other and confuse the customer? Or do they line up and add up to the same conclusion?

The ideal is *integrated marketing communications*. This is when all aspects of your marketing communications programs are sending and reinforcing a single message. (See Chapter 5.)



KEY TERMS

Strategic alignment When mission, vision, values, corporate culture, positioning strategy, product strategy, pricing strategy, hiring strategy, brand strategy, message strategy, and creative strategy are all consistent. That is, they all add up to the same conclusion, and they don't contradict each other. Customers love companies with good strategic alignment. So do employees and stockholders.

Integrated marketing communications When all aspects of the marketing communications programs, from product to messaging to creative details, fit together and reinforce a single overarching message in all media. Integrated communications are more effective than diverse or divergent communications, because they reinforce the message through repetition and consistency.

Principle Four: The Heart Trumps the Head

One of the fantasies of academia, economics, and corporate culture is that people behave rationally. But research has consistently shown that human behavior is more psychological than logical, and that, with rare exceptions, the heart trumps the head every time.

TRAIN YOURSELF TO THINK EMOTIONALLY

Practice observing the behavior of people around you. Make guesses about their driving subconscious motivations. Then guess what they are likely to do next. Observe how often your guesses are correct, and learn from your mistakes. Keep practicing and you will develop the emotional radar that is essential in marketing.

When you are listening to someone, ignore what he or she is saying and notice the body language. Or close your eyes and listen to the emotional tone of the words. Notice what people are not saying or what they are avoiding.

Notice what you are feeling in any given situation and try to describe it in words or images. The more you know about your own feelings, the more you can recognize the feelings of others. The more you recognize the feelings of others, the more you can influence them.

TRICKS
OF THE
TRADE

Even in highly technical business-to-business purchases, before a detailed rational analysis is made of product performance and cost, an emotional decision is made about which suppliers to consider. And when there is engineering or price parity among the finalists, the vendor selection is made on the basis of chemistry or other emotional factors.

BRAND COP

In order to ensure integration of marketing communications, someone must be the “brand cop” with the authority and responsibility to enforce the rules across divisions and products and departments. The brand cop must have the unflinching support of top management over a long period of time. Otherwise, it’s easy for people in an enterprising division to “do their own thing” and confuse your brand.

SMART



MANAGING

Your goal as a marketer is to connect the soul of your brand with the heart of your target market. Notice what you are feeling in any given situation, and try to describe it in words or images. The more you know about your own feelings, the more you can recognize the feelings of others. The more you recognize the feelings of others, the more you can influence them. Psychotherapy is a great way to accelerate this learning.

It’s bad when your brand lacks emotional connection with your customers. Another way of saying this is that your customers couldn’t care less about your brand. They believe you have nothing unique or special. You become a mere commodity to them. (See Figure 4-2.) They believe they can

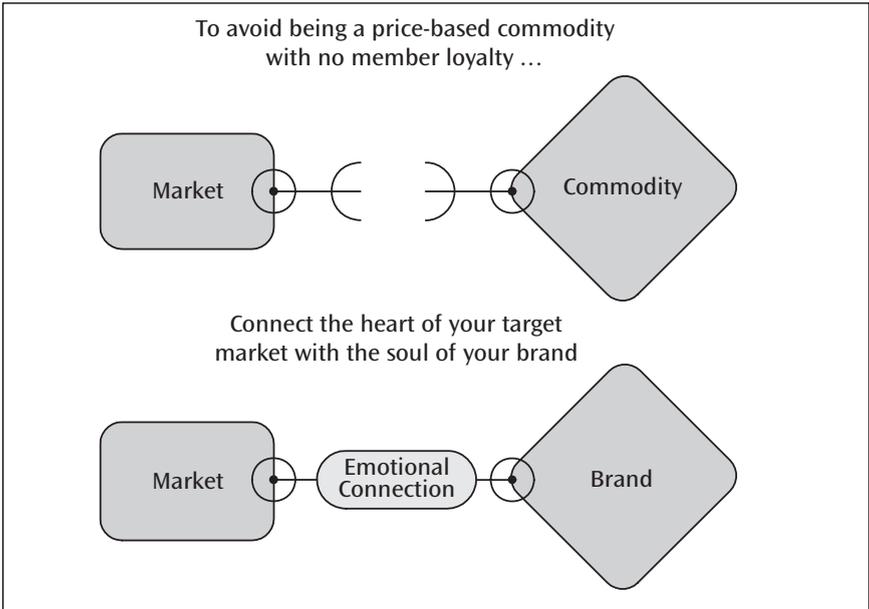


Figure 4-2. Emotional connection prevents commodification

get the same products or services from another supplier, so you're feeling pressure to lower your prices just to stay in the game. When another supplier underbids you, the customers chase the low price elsewhere. You have none of the protection and security that brand loyalty affords.

Marketers who connect their brand to the emotional needs of their targets reap some amazing benefits. When your customers feel a stronger emotional response to your product than to a competitor's comparable product, you will sell more of your product, your customers will be more loyal, and you can charge up to 200 percent more than your competitors.

When it comes to marketing, grab their hearts, and their heads will follow. The main job of our rational minds is to rationalize our emotional choices.

Principle Five: Emotional Truths Are Invisible Truths

Most human beings are incapable of consciously articulating the deep motives for their own behavior. Do you really think the primary reason that people buy an expensive luxury car is because the car is "well engineered"? Or do you think it has something to do with a desire to impress

others with their wealth and accomplishment? It is not that people intentionally set out to lie or mislead. It's just that we often need to protect ourselves from our subconscious motives, because our motives are not socially acceptable.

How widespread is this unconscious behavior? Many cognitive scientists operate on the assumption that 95 percent of all human behavior is unconscious. What people can consciously articulate about their own motives has about a 10 percent chance of being accurate.

Many companies spend millions of dollars on focus groups or surveys to ask their customers to consciously articulate their reasons for buying or not buying a particular product. The answers customers give to this kind of literal questioning are almost always misleading, if not downright wrong. "Why, yes," says the customer, "now that you ask, I would rather spend this weekend volunteering to help the poor and the sick, rather than just sitting back and eating a pizza and watching TV." If you believe answers like these, I have some swampland in Florida I'd like to sell you.

You are far better off using actual consumer behavior as an information source, such as information from data mining or direct response tests, or using indirect testing that safely reveals subconscious motives only to the researcher.

Principle Six: Barry Callen's Teeter-Totter Theory of All Human Behavior™

Marketing today is complex. Markets have fragmented into thousands of micro-groups. Competitors can come at you from other countries and from totally unrelated industries. Media are everywhere, from cell phones to restroom walls.

There is a simple tool for dealing with all this complexity. I call it "Barry Callen's Teeter-Totter Theory of All Human Behavior." You can use this theory to reduce the most complex marketing decision to its simplest essence: *Human behavior is a teeter-totter of fear and desire. When desire outweighs fear, we act. When fear outweighs desire, we don't.*

And there is Tipper's Corollary: *Our job as marketers is to add to the desire and take away the fear.* Then the teeter-totter tips and the customer makes a million-dollar purchase ... or calls to find out more.

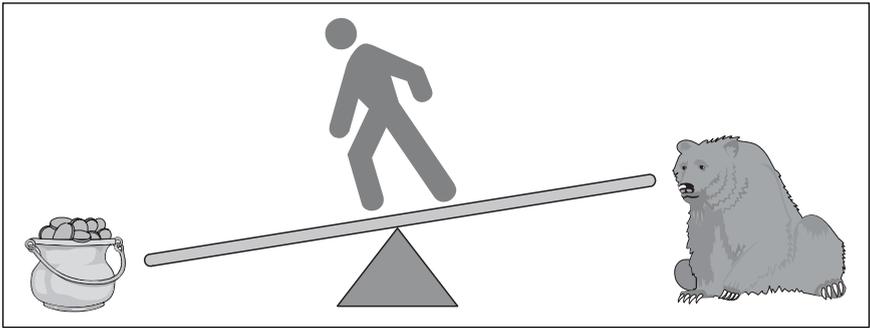


Figure 4-4. Barry Callen's teeter-totter theory of human behavior: every decision and perception is a balance between desire and fear

Every purchase decision is a balance of fear and desire, usually unspoken. Here are some examples:

- Women's shoes: "I want big comfortable squishy soles, but I'm afraid I'll look like a nurse or an old lady."
- Home loans: "I want my dream house, but I'm afraid I'll end up in the poor house."
- Teenage backpack: "I want to look like an individual, but I'm afraid I won't fit in."
- Diabetic food: "I want something sweet, but I'm afraid this artificial stuff will taste like cardboard."

Your job as marketer is to increase your customers' desire through all



THE FOUR RISKS

Identify which of the following four risks your customers must take in order to purchase your product. Then take steps to reduce their greatest risk through foolproof product design, lower price, demonstrations or free samples, or money-back guarantees.

TOOLS

- *Physical Risk*—"I might lose money, get tired, get sick, die, lose my job, dislike the taste, lose my possessions."
- *Self-Image Risk*—"I'm not the kind of person who does or doesn't do that, or does or doesn't own that, or does or doesn't believe that. That's just not who I think I am."
- *Social Risk*—"I'd be embarrassed if other people knew I did or did not do something or own something or believe something."
- *Risk to Perception of Reality*—"It's not possible. The world doesn't work this way. This can't be real."

MARKETING AROUND THE FOUR RISKS

Physical Risk—Examples of products that help reduce physical risk: FDIC insurance on deposits, power tools, vitamin C, health care, vocational training, restaurants, burglar alarms

Self-Image Risk—Examples of products that help reinforce self-image: luxury car, college diploma, morning-after pill, hair color, gym membership

Social Risk—Examples of products that help prevent embarrassment: adult diapers, hair implants, herpes medication, computer encryption software, expensive watch

Risk to Perception of Reality—Examples of products that help reassure: religion, political parties, education, psychotherapy, New Age healing crystals

It is almost never a good idea for marketers to ask their customers to risk their perception of reality. That's simply too painful for most people to do. It's always better for marketers to build on their customers' current perception of reality.



the marketing mix tools at your disposal: product design, price, promotion, messaging, and advertising. And your job is also to reduce their fears through tactics like requesting a low-risk call to action such as “Contact us for more information.” Or you can provide powerful concrete reasons for a cynic to believe, such as demonstrations, samples, free trials, testimonials, or a money-back guarantee.

The next time you are faced with a tough marketing decision, ask yourself this: “What do my customers desire? What do they fear? What can I do about it?”

Then use the marketing tools you have to tip the teeter-totter in your direction.

Principle Seven: If You Want to Get Rich, You Have to Niche

If you have all the money and all the time in the world, you do not need to have a strategy. But if you have limits to your budget, you will need a strategy. Which target market will you *not* serve? Which benefit will you *not* offer? It is a difficult and unpopular question, but that is the question market strategy asks.

Be careful of trying to be all things to all people. By casting a wider net and not excluding anyone, you actually *decrease* your chances of success.

Principle Eight: Stand for Something or You'll Fall Down

Don't try to be all things to all people or you'll end up not being anything to anyone. Strategy is sacrifice. Pick something, stand for something, and stick with it.

Principle Nine: Zig When Others Zag, and Vice Versa

The human brain is hard-wired to notice anything new or different. To make sure your ads stand out in a sea of clutter, make them different from everyone else's. This takes guts.

It also takes a different approach. To make sure your advertising stands out in any form (TV commercial, print ad, Web site, brochure, etc.), do a zig-zag analysis (see sidebar on next page).



Figure 4-5. Which word did you notice first?

There are four things you can do to help your marketing communications stand out more:



Permission marketing
Technique of obtaining the prospect's permission before advancing to the next step in the selling process, usually beginning by offering information on the subject or brand. That way the advertising is not an intrusion, not interrupting what the prospect is thinking about already.

KEY TERM

- Offer something relevant or useful that is worth paying attention to.
- Create an unusual ad or idea that is new and unexpected.
- Narrow your target market and your media, and tailor your message to them.
- Use permission marketing.

ZIG-ZAG ANALYSIS

Step 1. Gather together all the brochures, home pages, commercials, ads, etc., from all your major competitors.

Step 2. Stick them up on a wall or a large piece of cardboard or matt board.

Step 3. List all the elements those materials have in common. For example:

Zig-Zag Analysis of Trade Magazine Ads

1. Four-color photo of the computer exterior
2. Obviously staged photo of multiethnic business team members shaking hands around a mahogany conference table
3. The color blue in the logo
4. These words in the headline or tagline: partnership, quality, solutions, professional, scientific, leader
5. Long list of dealer locations
6. Company name and logo at least 12 times per ad
7. Small legal type taking up the bottom quarter of ad
8. Helvetica type

Step 4: In designing your new marketing communications, do *not* make an ad with any of the characteristics listed. Create something different, unique, and your ad is far more likely to stand out.



TOOLS

SWIM IN UNCHARTED WATERS

Our ad agency did a zig-zag analysis of the ads in the enthusiast publications for scuba diving. All the ads, including our client's ad, were virtually identical. There was a blue underwater shot of a scuba diver floating by, observing an undersea terrain or creature. (Even the editorial in the magazines largely used the same type of shot.) There were very few words: only a list of technical specifications. Nothing stood out.

So we created ads that used unusual background colors: red, yellow, pink, orange, and purple. We inset a small photo of an unusual or dramatic undersea detail into a long adventure story with a provocative headline. The stories were all true and all demonstrated the lifesaving benefits of the scuba equipment under extreme conditions, such as exploring the world's longest underwater cave. The ads got noticed because they zagged where all the others zigged.



Principle Ten: One Ad, One Idea

The average person will take less than half a second to decide whether or not to pay any attention to your ad. This means that you must pick your most attractive point and make it the first thing people see or hear.

People no longer read. They skim. Think about how you open your mail. Change the channels on your TV. or read a magazine.

Studies show that even after you decide to pay attention to an ad, you still actually only skim it for points of interest—first the headline or main visual, then subsidiary photos and photo captions, then the logo or tagline. Only then do you actually read the body copy in the ad.

Because of the way people now skim information and skip large chunks to save time and energy, it is ill-advised to present the readers or viewers with a long list of points. Make sure every ad has one main idea.

Principle Eleven: Be Both Relevant and Unique

Your goal as a company and as a marketer is to create an important difference that will cause your target market to choose you over your competitors. That's what the customer takes for granted. For example, we expect every car to have an engine, a chassis, brakes, an accelerator, and a steering wheel. But if you're the first carmaker to include lots of useful cup holders, you just might attract some new customers, as one Japanese carmaker discovered. And it's not enough to do something different that is not important to the customer. So what if your gasoline has a chemical additive that no competitor offers? Why is it important to the customer? How will the customer benefit? But if you tell the customer about your chemical additive that cleans the engine, you might have a difference that is important to them.

The same thing is true of your ads. They must be both relevant to the audience and unexpected. The relevance makes them useful. The unexpected makes them get noticed. Very few ads are both relevant and unexpected.

You must do both.

Principle Twelve: Don't Swim Upstream

Trout make lousy marketers because they are always trying to swim upstream, which requires a far greater investment of time and energy. It is no accident that many trout die along the journey. So do many marketers who spend considerable sums trying to impose their views on their target market.

Your job as a marketer is to go with the flow of your customers' natural tendencies as much as possible. You don't want to change their minds; you want to build on their current perceptions. You want to require the least possible change on their part—the least change of perception, the least change of behavior. The less you ask of them, the more you lower their risk and the more likely they are to act in ways that benefit you.

Don't try to make water run uphill. A sure sign you are doing this is when you use the word "should." "Well, gosh darn it! Diabetics should want to give up sweets! They should want to eat our vegetables." Instead, say, "Diabetics want sweets. Therefore we'll develop a sweet-tasting low-glycemic dinner dessert for them." The less change you ask of them, the more likely you are to succeed.

Go with the flow. Ride the market horse in the direction it's going.

Principle Thirteen: First, Pick the Low-Hanging Fruit

The single most profitable target market you will ever have is your current customers. They know your name, they believe your reputation, they've had a good experience, they've developed some loyalty toward you, and they perceive purchasing from you as less risky. You often know their names and have their contact information, which enables you to bypass expensive mass media and use less expensive, more targeted media, such as in-store signage, e-mail, or snail mail. They are often more receptive to information about your category or product or brand.

They are also most likely to generate the most profit and make the most purchases each year—and most likely to persuade the people they know to try your product. It almost always costs far more money to attract

a first-time customer than it does to get a current or past customer to buy more or buy again. So before you reach out to prospective customers, make sure you have maximized your return on your current customers.

In many businesses, developing a customer profile and database enables companies to identify which customers have the highest lifetime value. For example, mortgage customers are more profitable to a bank than ATM customers, because they are likely to have a relationship with the bank for decades. Checking customers are more profitable than auto loan customers, because they tend to stay with the bank longer.

You can even create databases that are capable of predicting which of your customers will respond best to particular cross-selling opportunities. You can also use databases to identify types of people who are most likely to buy your product. There are lifestyle databases that can be combined with your actual customer sales to determine the degree of market penetration and the likely total market potential of a particular city or zip code or media broadcast area. Wise marketers first concentrate on maximizing awareness and sales among people who match the profiles of their heavy users. Only when they have worked that group or geographic area to the max do they move to the next group or area. They pick the low-hanging fruit first.

Principle Fourteen: Avoid B.S.

Almost all adults in America believe that they can see through advertising B.S. That is, until they become advertisers. Then they start generating advertising B.S. and believing in their own corporate B.S. It feels disloyal not to believe.

But it doesn't matter what they believe. Because, in test after test of advertising, their customers see right through the vague wording, the bragging, the exaggerated claims, and the staged photos. Today, words that are too "addy" or "selly" or "commercial" or "corporate" are actually cues to consumers not to believe the advertiser. The marketers who use such words generate a backlash of skepticism that can destroy the credibility of their brand. The use of B.S. words has become so prevalent that there is now a piece of software that analyzes the words in a communication for its percentage of B.S.

These days it is almost impossible to surmount the skepticism of the public. People need powerful reasons to believe your message, not B.S. words to make them disbelieve.

The first and best way to avoid B.S. is not to exaggerate. I repeat: underpromise and overdeliver. Advertising sets expectations by making promises. Set them too high and you're actually disappointing your customer and damaging the credibility of future communications. Always check your advertising claims against your ability to deliver.

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 4

- ✓ Marketing is an unnatural act. You must train yourself not to fall into your own natural human tendencies.
- ✓ Understand, remember, and apply these 16 principles:
 1. No one knows for sure what will work.
 2. When you dance with the customers, let them lead.
 3. Integrate and align everything.
 4. The heart trumps the head.
 5. People lie, especially to themselves
 6. Barry Callen's teeter-totter theory of all human behavior™:
"Human behavior is a teeter-totter of fear and desire. When desire outweighs fear, we act. When fear outweighs desire, we don't."
 7. If you want to get rich, you have to niche.
 8. Stand for something or you'll fall down.
 9. Zig when others zag, and vice versa.
 10. One ad, one idea.
 11. Be both relevant and unique.
 12. Don't swim upstream.
 13. First, pick the low-hanging fruit.
 14. Avoid B.S.