

What Exactly Is Marketing?

In her *Sales Solutions* column in the July issue of *Southern Graphics*, Barbara Leary wrote about the differences between “sales” and “marketing.” I thought I’d take on that same topic today. As you’ll read, I have a different perspective on those activities than Barbara has.

First, I’d like to change the terminology a little bit. In place of the term *sales* let’s use the word *selling*. Then, let’s define *selling* as the activity in which an actual person—a salesperson or sales representative—is in contact with the decision-maker at the front end of the process of *marketing* a product or service.

The key point I want to make is that selling and marketing are not “brother” or “sister” activities which can be part of your business on an either/or basis. Marketing is the “parent” activity or discipline, and selling is one of its children. I like to define marketing as *the broad business discipline that connects people and organizations with the products or services they desire or require*.

That broad discipline include advertising and promotion, market research, product development, telemarketing, the advertising and promotional activity that most printers call “direct mail,” and face-to-face selling too.

Marketing Cycle

Marketing is an activity that typically follows a cycle, beginning with the establishment of a product or a need. Sometimes the cycle is “product driven” when a company says “Hey, we can make or provide this *thing*. Now how do we get people to buy it?” In other cases, the cycle is “need driven” when a company learns that a need exists and says “Hey, we can see that there’s a need for a new *thing* here. Can we put a product or service together to meet that need?” No matter which way it originates, this is the sub-discipline of marketing called *product development*.

This particular activity may not seem fully applicable to your business right now. In fact, most of the printers I talk with aren’t looking to blaze new ground in products or services, they’re just trying to sell more printing! But what I want you to realize is that there was a time in our history when *printing* was a new product. Gutenberg and Ben Franklin and many others were involved in the *product development* of the basic product and service you sell!

More Questions

Marketing is much more than just an attitude or philosophy. Marketing is a process of asking questions and acting on the answers. I think the essence of marketing a printing company in the present era revolves around answering questions like these: What do our customers and prospects want or need? How do we build the capability to provide it? How do we then communicate to them that we provide it? How do we make ourselves visible? How do we make ourselves easy to deal with? How do we make ourselves profitable while meeting market need? The ultimate question is this...how do we convince people to buy their printing from us?

The answers to these questions suggest marketing strategies, and the most effective overall strategy is likely to combine a number of the “sub-disciplines” of marketing. A market research study can help to identify customer and prospect “hot buttons.” That information can tell you what to stress in your advertising, or what kind of promotion might work in your area. You can then put that message out to the marketplace, through your salesforce, or perhaps using direct mail.

Measurable

And marketing *is* measurable. If nothing else, when you measure your sales results you are measuring the performance of your marketing. If you develop a new product or service; if you improve the effectiveness of your advertising; if you run a successful promotion; if you increase the capabilities of your salespeople through training...all of these marketing activities will show up in your sales figures. Successful marketers keep track of the “before” and the “after.”

Some of the sub-disciplines of marketing are especially measurable. Direct mail is a perfect example. Let’s say that you commit to sending out 2000 mailers each month. The first month, you get 40 responses. The second month, you get 45. The third month, you get 60. This program is working...the easily measurable numbers tell you so!

In the sixth month, your mailer peaks at 100 responses. The next four months bring you 85, 65, 35, and 20 responses. Now the easily measurable numbers are telling you that this mailer has become stale. It’s time to make a change.

Successful marketers study the numbers. They also ask lots of “why” questions during the implementation stages of their marketing programs. In marketing—as in so many things—it’s important to learn from both your successes and your failures.

Bottom Line

Selling and marketing aren’t two different activities. Selling is a part of the overall discipline of marketing. But for a printer, face-to-face selling might be the most important part.

That’s one point on which I think Barbara and I agree. In her column, she wrote that “the vehicle for implementing the marketing program is a well-directed sales force.” No matter how you define it, marketing is not a substitute for selling. A printing salesperson ultimately has to convince people to buy what he or she sells. Maybe the bottom line is this...what you really want “marketing” to do for you is to make it easier to sell. And it can. Effective marketing will lead to increased sales.