

How the Marketplace is Redefining the Sales and Marketing Relationship

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Brand marketers, take note: the sales force is fast becoming a **major determinant** in whether or not **the consumer** receives your brand marketing message. This dramatic shift in the sales role should be viewed as a significant lever in implementing brand marketing strategies. But using this lever will mean making salespeople more aware of and conversant with brand positioning and marketing strategies.

Just how has this shift come about? Some major changes in the retail marketplace have given salespeople significant control over funds for local customer and consumer marketing. Their "position of influence" has grown as a result. The retail customer is also fast becoming a competent and aggressive marketer of their store franchise.

A closer look at these changes will help in understanding their effect on brand positioning and marketing strategy implementation.

Rewriting the Sales Job Description

First, the sales force job description is being radically reshaped. Certainly, the traditional tasks of presenting manufacturer's promotion programs, selling new items, maneuvering for shelf space, merchandising product, handling credits and deductions, and gathering marketplace intelligence are all still important parts of the sales function. But the field role has expanded significantly beyond these duties to include decision-making responsibilities for spending that directly affect the implementation of brand marketing strategy.

The Retailer as Self-Marketer

Secondly, the customer's buyer is no longer merely a purchasing agent, and retail outlets are no longer merely distribution outlets for manufacturers' products. Instead, retailers are becoming marketers in their own right. These days, the retail marketer's job is to promote their store franchise to the consumer in

the same way that the brand manager promotes their brand franchise to the consumer. To do so, retail marketers are developing programs designed not to promote specific brands, but to promote their stores and entice consumers to shop there. Marketplace roles are being turned upside down as retailers pitch their own promotional programs to manufacturers' salespeople.

Both Buyer and Seller

All of this leads us to the third change facing the sales force: Salespeople are no longer simply sellers of marketing and promotion programs; they are buyers of them as well. Although brand marketing programs are certainly alive and well, salespeople now must also consider the additional product promotion opportunities offered by the retailer's marketing programs.

Let's look at the possibilities that this new sales role offers. Consider this simple example: If a brand's positioning is "premium quality/premium price," the sales force shouldn't be consistently placing the product in a retail marketing program that is focused on value-pricing. A move such as this can undo the entire brand marketing strategy by badly confusing consumers. This type of mistake can happen all too easily unless the sales force actually knows the brand strategy and is equipped and trained to properly market it to the retailer. The bottom line: a great deal of brand marketing communications with consumers must go through the retailer, and the field organization now plays a critically important role in maximizing the effectiveness of this communication.

How Marketers Can Help

With these changes afoot, it's imperative that salespeople fully understand brand strategy and positioning. Sure, marketers and salespeople have sometimes talked about how important this is, but this notion has rarely been given little more than lip

service. Now that salespeople are spending brand marketing dollars for the brand marketer, they are helping to implement brand marketing strategy. It's time for marketers to be directly involved in better equipping the sales force to handle this new role to ensure the integrity of their brand marketing strategies.

The marketer can help by giving the sales force the in-depth consumer data and understanding that form the basis for brand positioning and strategy. This is a key area where marketers can help promote brand strategy. On one hand, the retailer is fast becoming an accomplished marketer with ample information about the buying habits of the store's best customers. But the retailer also recognizes that the manufacturer is the expert on the consumer as a purchaser of the category or brand.

Understanding the dynamics of the brand purchaser, however, is not enough. The salesperson must be able to give the retailer consumer-based data at the category level that's been analyzed and interpreted from the **retailer's** perspective. In effect, the salesperson must be able to integrate the manufacturer's "brand buyer" profile with the retailer's own data on the store shopper. The marketer must help the sales force in creating this added value for the retailer. The marketer can do a great deal to make sure the salesperson understands brand strategy. It may not be in the marketer's job description to do so, but it's certainly in the marketer's best interest. And, while it's certainly not in the purview of marketers to provide sales force training, brand marketers can and should be involved in this type of training.

A New Relationship

Marketplace forces are creating a new relationship between the traditional sales and marketing functions at consumer goods companies. One of the most radical aspects of this relationship is the role of the field organization in managing the implementation of brand strategy and the consistent communication of brand message/position to the consumer through the trade. Marketers should help salespeople be effective in this role. They should become directly involved in the training and ongoing communications initiatives necessary to keep field personnel up-to-date on brand strategies. Marketers should also help equip salespeople with the knowledge that's needed to

effectively communicate brand messages to consumers through retailers in the local marketplace.

Reprinted with permission from: Food & Beverage Marketing, August, '94; Marketing News, October, '94.