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Book Reviews

Marketing Revolution: The Radical New Approach to Transforming the Business, the Brand and the Bottom Line

Paul R. Gamble, Alan Tapp, Anthony Marsella and Merlin Stone
Kogan Page, 2005; hardback; 288pp; £24.95
ISBN 0-7494-4385-5

Revolution?

The title of this book is a tad sensational. As the authors say, today revolution refers to a radical change. To be a revolutionary is to be someone who threatens to overturn the world as we know it. But without question marketing is evolving and transforming in an attempt to match the rapid changes in the business marketplace and the unprecedented speed of new media communications. Any corporation faced with the new marketing landscape that does not change or does not reinvent itself from time to time will be rigid, and, as witnessed by some traditional household-name companies, will likely be forced out of business by the competition.

Reasons and needs for change

What this book does rather well, in a colloquial way, is to pull together the reasons why marketing has to change. The changes, for example, in retail from groceries, financial services, travel, utilities etc through both traditional channels and more recently e-channels have created a new customer, who expects to be able to make his/her own choices from a wide range of options in most aspects of their lives. This attitude has broken up the traditional marketing/product life cycles that existed 20-plus years ago. All this leads marketing to focus on the customer experience with the brand and service, to build stronger emotional bonds, develop better channel strategies and fully integrate segmentation within the core business.

Customer insight and CRM

Once you are through the first two chapters, which rationalise why and what this 'marketing revolution' is all about, the heart of the text covers the latest developments in customer insight, strategic planning, segmentation, branding, CRM and operational analytics. This brings in strands of thinking from the authors' previous books, particularly customer insight and CRM. CRM is described as the heart of the new agenda for marketing, but CRM has been a marketing tool for the past seven or eight years and has recently received a poor press (not perhaps always for the right reasons). Customer insight was in vogue a couple of years ago and at its simplest level is a combination of traditional marketing research knowledge with customer information, contained on a marketing database (soft and hard data). Segmentation, whether it is value-led or otherwise, has been explored by marketers in varying degrees for decades.

A good synthesis

What this book does do well is synthesise these developments and advances in marketing into a more complete process of change. As an introduction to each of the subjects it is very good and presents an

overview of what could be termed a new marketing process. Certainly marketing today is not how Kotler envisaged it — the 4‘P’s and the 7‘P’s went out with the 1990s. The real challenge for marketers is to keep up with increasingly informed, aware customers who have their own database capabilities, to engage the customer selectively through appropriate channels and to develop a dialogue which maximises the capabilities and speed of the new media communications. What is really required is not a ‘revolution’ but, with the understanding of the market dynamics, marketers need to use their imagination, attempt to think laterally and not be afraid to experiment.

Case histories

This book also contains some useful case histories from such companies as IBM, Unilever, the Vehicle Licensing Agency, Finnair and of course the mandatory Tesco. The cases tend to highlight companies which have attempted part or all of the new agenda. As an introduction to the changes happening in the marketing departments of the more enlightened companies I would recommend this book. But I am left with a feeling of the need to engage with customers on the customer journey, develop a smart, agile dialogue with them while at the same time integrating marketing into the core business and its functions. How exactly I do this is another issue and perhaps another book.

Derek Holder MD, IDM

Who Let the Blogs Out? A Hyperconnected Peek at the World of Blogs

Biz Stone

St Martin’s Griffin, 2004; 244pp; paperback; £5.84

ISBN: 0-312-33000-6

It doesn’t slow down, this digital stuff. While you were still getting the company website up people started telling you about web advertising. By the time you’d started on your banners, viral marketing had become all the rage. Just as you were getting ready for your first viral, search engine keywords became the new customer acquisition tool. In the midst of building your keyword lists, metrics and analysis came into vogue. And now it’s happened again: blogs are another you can’t put off any more.

A light read and a good start on a tidal wave

The good news is that spending a couple of hours in the company of Biz Stone and his new light read *Who Let the Blogs Out?* will give you a good start — and as a simple orientation it’s probably all you need.

What began as a trickle of personal homepages a few years ago has become a tidal wave of personal publishing. A new blog launches into the ‘blogsphere’ (yep, it really is called that) every second. What are they? Imagine a fusion between personal homepages, microsites, chats in the pub and an old-style ‘Dear Diary’. These are the voices of millions and millions of people, all chatting and all connected. With the cost of starting up now zero, and the content management tools something you’d have been charged thousands for just a few years before, this is also the new entry point for anyone wanting a webpage.

Why it matters

So why does it matter to you? Well, if you are part of a micro-business run without overheads, then it's a great way to save money on your website. But the real reasons you need to understand the blogging explosion are way more profound than saving a few quid on your advertising. Here's a few to think about.

- Bloggers are talking about you already: google your brand and you're bound to find mentions in some blogs. If it hasn't happened yet then give it another few months and they'll be there. (They're also talking about your competitors, by the way, and you might like to see what the verdict is.)
- Some of the people in your organisation probably have blogs: like it or not they're free thinkers and at some point may talk about your firm. You may like the idea, you may be terrified of the idea, but being ignorant of it is pointless.
- Your brand could be blogging as well. It's a new communications channel marketers can harness and include within their wider mix. You may even be able to post on other people's blogs, because that's how this community works — though my plea is that you get real smart and are then real sensitive about the etiquette of these personal spaces before you go near any of that.
- And blogging is now going mainstream (think about Google and Messenger if you're trying to get a handle on the scale of what that means).

A new marketing landscape

If that's not enough then try this: the attitudes your customers have will undergo another seismic shift as they wise up to blogs. The new hyperconnected world has enabled an explosion of conversations. Harness these with the instant ability to discover information about anything at the click of a search engine, and you have a radically new landscape for marketing. If your messages are not accurate, your brand promises not fulfilled, your products not matching expectations, then it's not one customer you're losing any more, it could be all of them!

On the bright side, if you have something useful to say then you can use blogs to draw your customers' attention: you can create your own new constant relationship channel.

The blog world, its tools and etiquette

So what Stone usefully does is provide a simple induction to the tools, the world, the etiquette and the role blogs are filling. It's enough to engage and familiarise you, without scaring the uninitiated into hurling their laptops and marketing plans out of the window, and it's insightful enough to help the more web-savvy fill in some knowledge gaps. Anything that demystifies the digital world is seriously good news and Stone's contribution ranks well.

You'll discover how it all began, why it has ignited the interest of millions, the scale of its growth and even how you can build your own blog. You'll find out why politicians and backpackers are turning to them, why employees got fired for them and some important etiquette of blogging (like *never* writing posts after a night at the pub!)

The implications and challenges

For the more sophisticated reader there's a clear case why the social software behind blogs will have much wider implications on knowledge management, intranets, market research and product development. You'll come away with useful insights into the challenges firms will soon have in responding to this, but at the same time a confidence that there are some smart ways through. Along with meadows-klue.blogs.com you'll find some other useful starting points.

So there you have it. An easy-going romp through another digital channel that as a marketer you need to be aware of. What you do afterwards is up to you and your imagination.

Danny Meadows-Klue
Chief Executive, Digital Strategy Consulting

How Customers Think: Essential Insights into the Mind of the Market

Gerald (Jerry) Zaltman

Harvard Business School Press, 2003; hardback; 323pp; £17.99

ISBN:1578518261

The customer mind as a bridge from research to purchase

Undertaking and applying market research is both art and science — blending perspiration, interpretation and inspiration. Many marketers know to their cost that the bridge between research outcomes and purchase behaviour is a difficult one to cross. It is the nature of this bridge — the customer's mind — that is the subject of this book.

The toughness and importance of the customer insight challenge makes this book promising reading. A better understanding of how customers think will surely help every market researcher and marketer. So is the expectation (or in Zaltman's model, the 'anticipation') fulfilled?

This is a book of two halves. It opens with some pretty unilluminating definitions of such mind-boggling terms as 'brain', 'thinking', 'thought' and 'concept'. Which is a shame, because there are some thought-provoking (if not new) nuggets that are worth persisting for.

A stimulating first half...

The first few chapters present an assemblage (albeit narrow and skewed) of analyses and constructs of how people think. Through metaphors, consensus, storytelling, imaging and the dominant role of our subconscious, our conscious thoughts and actions are shaped. It is these early chapters that are the more stimulating.

...lacking practical follow-up

Understanding those building blocks of 'thinking' should help marketers to strengthen advertising communications, build better brands and develop deeper customer relationships. But the author's attempts to derive practical applications from these fail. Bland checklists are presented on 'how to be creative' and 'launching a new mind-set'. For example, just what do the following ten 'crowbars' for creative thinking do for you?

- Favour restlessness over contentment.
- Wonder about the cow's crumpled horn.

- Play with accidental data.
- View conclusions as beginnings.
- Get outdated.
- Stop squeezing the same baby chicken.
- Nurture cool passion.
- Have the courage of your convictions, not someone else's.
- Ask generic questions.
- Avoid premature dismissal.

Anticlimax

Chapter 12 is simply an anticlimax. Entitled 'Quality questions beget quality answers', its 20 or so pages provide little in the way of new ideas or insight for even the moderately competent market researcher.

Perhaps the best purpose served by this book is to remind us how complex the human mind is — and the difficulty marketers will continue to have in truly understanding customer perceptions and motivations, let alone in predicting their likely behaviour.

Try Susan Greenfield

One resonant statement is that marketers 'can find more knowledge about consumers outside the marketing discipline'. While the author limits his qualification of this statement to the fact that 'market research provides only a small part of available knowledge about customers', it reminds us there is a wealth of valuable marketing insights to be found in the works of neuroscientists such as Susan Greenfield *et al.*

Ninety-five per cent of thought, emotion and learning occur in the unconscious mind. Only 5 per cent of what we do occurs in the high-order consciousness. Understanding customers requires an intimate level of empathy. A brand is built not through isolated marketing messages, but against a complex backcloth of — mainly subconscious — contexts and inputs.

The reconstructive nature of memory should also be of great interest (concern!) to marketers. Having spent your ad budget telling customers how great your brand is, you're then left at the mercy of their memory (to remember it 'their way'). Constant reinforcement and support of the brand message is vital, using all the building blocks. 'Filling in the gaps' and 'perception by consensus' are another two liberties of the free mind that marketers and researchers must also do battle with!

Some interesting case stories

Every now and again, but not nearly frequently enough, an illuminating case story provides a handle back on reality and application for some of the ideas. But even many of these will be anodyne to the erudite marketer.

So let's conclude with Chapter 13, which opens to the quote: 'Few occasions intimidate and excite us as much as beginnings.' The corollary to which is that endings are a let down. Unfortunately, this book is hardly 'out of the box' on that one.

Neil Morris F IDM