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'Tis a Strange, Yet Wonderful Time!

Knowing what works puts you ahead of the game.

BY BOB CIRONDI

ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FREE MARKET IN which U.S. marketing operates is the chaos it produces. In turn, this chaos brings the innovation that keeps it exciting...and challenging.

This chaos-innovation-challenge cycle has not bypassed us as marketers who operate in the pharmaceutical arena. Whether this cycle is driven by political, economic, corporate, or technological issues, we are charged with developing, executing, and evaluating the proper competitive responses.

So, How Do We Do That?

First, our strategic response to this dynamic and ever-changing environment must be equally dynamic and timely.

Second, because we cannot personally address the root causes of the current situation, nor the underlying dynamics that impact our daily responsibilities, we must stay with the basics...elevating the practice of common sense to a virtue.

Third, marketing is simple. Regardless of how complex the competitive environment or the arena in which it exists, we have just four variables to deal with: product (or service), price, promotion, and placement/distribution.

Our strategic planning process must be logical. Once we have developed a full understanding of our current situation (hopefully, working through a well-thought-out SWOT analysis), we should develop our objectives based on our analysis of the current situation we face. And, they should be stated in a realistic manner that allows for accountability (specific quantified goals to be achieved over a specific time period).

Focusing on the four marketing variables, specific strategies should be developed to satisfy our objectives.

It is only then that we should decide which specific tactics should be engaged to satisfy our chosen strategies. Too many marketers decide on tactics first, work backwards through strategies to objectives, and eventually wonder why they weren't able to satisfy the objectives.

Costing out the tactical plan should determine how much budget will be needed to employ the tactics that will satisfy the strategies needed to achieve our stated objectives. Anything less should result in a restatement of the strategies and objectives. While living with available budgets may satisfy corporate requirements, doing so without resetting related objectives may result in a year's worth of performance anxiety and the need to continually explain why original objectives have not been achieved.

Ask Yourself

Here are a few other basics to consider—in no special order (they are all important)—all with a firm, continuing focus on our stated objectives and strategies:

- Is our marketing plan truly based on satisfying customer needs?
- Do we understand the value/productivity of each of our strategies and tactics so management will understand what will be lost if they are undersupported or eliminated?
- Is our plan fully coordinated across the four basic marketing variables?
- Is our target audience fully defined, well understood, and reachable?
- Are we presenting a compelling, yet easy-to-understand, product/service differentiation, position, and value proposition that will be considered relevant and believable by our target audience(s)...whether directed to the professional, DTC, DTP, or managed market segments?
- Does our promotional message fully support our detailing message? Or, if we have no detailing, will we be spending enough in the right places?
- Have we tested our message to be certain it addresses everyone's needs?
- Will we be providing enough in-depth content to satisfy customers' needs?
- Have we taken an unbiased, channel neutral approach to selecting the media in which our messages will appear?
- Have we allowed our marketing supplier-partners to provide objective viewpoints about our marketing plan and its elements?
- Have we mandated that our creative, strategic planning and media planning agencies work closely together to support what we're doing?
- Do we have a contingency plan available if it is necessary?

If you can honestly respond "yes" to each of these questions, CONGRATULATIONS! If not, you now know what work you still have ahead of you to guarantee a success.

Have a Great Year! ○

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