



MARKETING MATTERS

By Richard D. Czerniawski
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SUSTAINING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Today marks our 49th-wedding anniversary. My wife and I are celebrating it here in Pensacola, Florida. We were married at the chapel on the Naval Air Station, where I served. The Navy granted me two days, during the three-day President's Day holiday weekend to get married. (As the saying goes, if they wanted me to get married, they would have issued me a wife.)

When people learn of the longevity of our marriage, they ask, "what's the secret?" My wife answers that she's a (competitive) rower, so she has endurance. What a jokester. Not to be outdone, I reply that I frequently travel, so she doesn't have to endure me for too long.

When we get serious, we answer that neither of us has wanted to leave our marriage at the same time. Our marriage is like others. It has its ups and downs. You might say it is perfectly imperfect, which can probably be said about most things in life.

What does all this have to do with marketing? Well, being married suggests that each of us is or, at least, was marketable! All joking aside, it has to do with creating, nurturing and maintaining relationships with customers. Loyalty is important. Sustaining a customer is less costly than acquiring one. It takes work to sustain, and achieve, loyalty.

What are some of the things we, marketers, can do to achieve and sustain loyalty? Here are three things to consider:

1. Improve our product. In other words, we need to grow together with our customers, just like in a marriage. We need to adopt kaizen, continuously improving our product to keep-up with evolving customer needs. Product improvements may take the form of eliminating negatives (such as ingredients that have the potential to harm customers or the environment. etc.), finding new uses (e.g., new indications), and creating news (as with new clinical study outcomes, or initiatives, that benefit the customer). If we don't,

we risk a hungry competitor coming along to snatch our customers from us, or our customers falling away.

2. Get beyond our product and work to deliver a positive customer experience. Our products tend to be similar. We, therefore, need to serve our customers and serve them better than our competitors. While sustaining customers is a two-way street between the brand and customer, we should focus on giving more than we receive. We should do for our customers as we do for our spouses without expecting anything but their devotion in return. Intangibles, how we go about our business and those added-value services, create the positive experiences enjoyed by customers.
3. Serve one. I have eyes only for one, my wife. We should have eyes only for one, our customers. This is that segment of people who “believe what we believe” – our Brand Idea. Trying to serve others dilutes our focus, obfuscates our messaging, drains our resources, and leaves those who believe what we believe high and dry, and susceptible to competitive inroads and loss of interest in our brands.

Who knows what the coming years will bring to our marriage. I do hope that if I follow the actions mentioned above, it will bring many more years of love and devotion. I also hope that it enables us, marketers, to sustain customer loyalty to our brands.

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