



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## PROVOCATION MAY LEAD YOU TO SMART(ER) MARKETING

I had lunch in Barcelona this week with a client, who is an authentic marketing professional, and also a colleague, and friend. He flew in from Geneva to meet with me. He read chapters from a new book that I will be releasing, hopefully, by mid-year. It is titled, *AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS – How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing (in Pursuing Excellence)*. He mentioned that he is awe-struck with the generous amount of advice it contains on how marketers can make their marketing matter (more). However, being protective of me and wishing the book great success, he expressed concern that the title might turn-off some marketers and dampen its sales. Great point!

I sincerely appreciate and welcome his advice. However, I'm undaunted by being provocative and losing sales as a result. He is correct. It will turn-off some or, perhaps, many marketers. Too bad. I recognize that neither I nor my style is for everyone and, by the way, neither is your brand. I believe my target-audience is somewhat like me. Namely, marketers and senior managers who recognize that they are, and/or marketing is, underutilized and want to correct this situation through continuous personal development and improvement. I don't have time, as another birthday (that spans eight decades) is imminent, for those marketers who don't recognize that they and marketing can do more, much more, or are satisfied with the status quo.

There was yet another thing I wrote that he wanted to point out as being a potential turn-off, particularly in the pharmaceutical and medical device sectors, where they award (or reward) sales personnel with senior marketing positions. In the Prologue to the book, I describe a land Why/Where Marketing Doesn't Matter. One of the practices I identified is where organizations appoint highly successful salespeople to senior marketing positions. Again, he's correct. I may very well turn off these managers and those who put them in power.

Now, please note, I have nothing against sales personnel. I get along exceptionally well with them. I like and appreciate them and, ditto, they seem to like and appreciate me and what I bring to the table. They are highly personal and, importantly, critical to the success of any brand and business. However, they tend to be transactional – looking for that next sale. It's the nature of their work and focus.

On the other hand, marketers need to be transformational in creating brand loyalty. What is most troubling is the thought of non-marketing personnel, who do not understand all that marketing can be and do, regardless of the functional area, running marketing. I recall a Dilbert comic strip where someone from (I believe) HR (Human Resources) declares that senior-most management anointed him "VP and Head of Marketing." He admits that he knows absolutely nothing about marketing. However, he tells all marketers that as their Head of Marketing they must take direction from him.

So, he requests that they mosey along and do segmentation, or whatever marketers do. He'll let them know if they are doing "right."

The book is an attempt to identify why marketing is losing its relevance and what needs to be done to regain it. The subtitle, which highlights the word "dumb," is inspired from a quote credited to Charlie Munger, Warren Buffet's (the Wizard of Omaha) partner. Mr. Munger says, "We recognized early on that very smart people do very dumb things, and we wanted to know why and who, so that we could avoid them." If people who are running marketing don't know marketing or how to direct marketers to make their marketing matter, then it's plain dumb or, if you prefer, not very smart.

This brings me back to the theme of this musing. I would not appoint a successful salesperson into a prominent marketing role without her/him having first climbed the marketing ladder (i.e., earned her/his stripes in marketing). If that is not the case, then I would expect, at a minimum, that person to undergo professional marketing development to grow into her/his role as opposed to doing what the sales force expects marketing to do, whatever that is (develop viz-aids, answer sales personnel questions promptly, and so forth).

I have no intention of offending people. It's not in my nature nor do I take pleasure in doing so. However, I do want to provoke marketers and their organizations to appreciate that there's so much more to learn about doing marketing correctly so we may utilize it more fully and realize its value.

So, consider any of my provocations serving the same role as the keisaku, a flat wooden stick used in Zen meditation. It is used to strike the meditator to reinvigorate and awaken one suffering from fatigue or monkey mind (a mind that is not focused but filled with random thoughts).

Like the keisaku, the strike from which doesn't hurt, I hope my provocations will awaken marketers, regardless of sector, category, functional origin or country, to critical errors and lead them from dumb to smart marketing. After all, I believe "Marketing is too important to be ignored or left to people who don't know what they are doing."

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