

# **DISPATCHES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

---

## **FEED(BACK) AND GROW**



We need feedback to grow. According to John Hattie, Professor of Education and Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia, "The most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback." I concur, and I'm not alone. Many leaders from all walks of life—business, education, sports, the military, among others—believe that feedback is essential for learning and progress. At a minimum, to avoid repeating mistakes that undermine the achievement of our goals.

Feedback is providing direction about an individual's and brand's performance, et al.—against predetermined standards or objectives—to improve and predict outcomes. Therefore, if we desire personal or business growth to create a significant impact, we should welcome feedback. Steve Levitt, economist and author of *Freakonomics* says, "The key to learning is feedback. It is nearly impossible to learn anything without it." We don't improve anything without learning unless it is by chance. We can't run our businesses and brands on chance or hope.

Feedback is essential to move from eminence- to evidence-based marketing. We need it like a plant needs sunlight and water. We need it just as we need food to live. Importantly, we need to go beyond the "what" of performance to learn the "why," so we may make appropriate changes when and where warranted.

Unfortunately, many marketers fear feedback about their work. Perhaps, they feel it reflects poorly on themselves, their marketing plans, and activities. This fear of feedback

exacerbated in the clumsy way it is administered. Often the feedback is given to point out what is wrong. It typically is nearly always given without acknowledging what is correct. Nor does the feedback point the direction on what and how to improve. Stephen Covey, the author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, states, “It takes humility to seek feedback. It takes wisdom to understand it, analyze it and appropriately act on it.”

Whatever your feelings about feedback, you are going to receive it. Some of which you may or may not recognize it as such when it comes (e.g., determining what your sales results are revealing). If you want to be successful and take your brand to new heights, you should seek and be sensitive to it. Moreover, plan for it. Here are progressive stages of feedback you might consider in helping make your marketing matter more:

**Self-Examination:** This is the starting point for any feedback about your work. We are all capable of self-examination. The key is to establish and follow clear-cut and proven guidelines when self-examining your work. Create and use checklists that help you objectify your subjective judgment. For example, you might use our 5-Cs checklist when assessing brand strategies and plans. It enables you to check for clarity, completeness, competitiveness, cohesion, and choicefulness. Additionally, you might adopt the BDNI customer insight litmus test and creative brief scorecard, among others, to gain feedback about the quality of your work and what you need to do to make it more productive.

**Peer and Senior Management Review:** Ask colleagues and senior managers for feedback. Specifically, invite them to identify where you might improve your work regardless of whether it is a creative brief, brand positioning strategy, marketing plan, etc. However, do not undertake this until you have first conducted a thoughtful self-examination of your work and adapted it as needed. We need to share our best thinking to facilitate feedback from others. It is imperative that we remain open and genuinely understand the nature of the feedback and what we need to do to address it appropriately.

**Marketing Research:** There is much criticism that marketing research is being used in far too many instances and serves as a crutch for decision making. However, our experience suggests otherwise. In the majority of cases, there is insufficient testing of strategies and initiatives. Every initiative and idea we consider should have a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) behavior objective goal. A SMART behavior objective is critical in leading to the achievement of our business objectives (sales, market share, and profit). Then we need to engage in marketing research to determine if what we propose will drive the achievement of essential behavior objectives, for if it does not, we will fail to deliver the business objectives. We also want to test for a favorable ROI to ensure we are using marketing resources effectively and efficiently.

**Market Testing:** Once we successfully clear marketing research testing, we are ready for market testing. There is no substitute for market testing as it reflects real-world conditions—which include execution, competitive response, etc. Conduct market testing versus a control and compare outcomes pre and post the activity. Importantly, memorialize and share the results within the company to help create a learning

organization that operates on evidence, not eminence. Interestingly, our healthcare clients persist in claiming their HCP customers want the data, while they provide no to little data to their senior managers regarding the productivity of their marketing.

**Market Expansion:** We go from market testing to expand nationally and/or into other countries. We do not recommend expanding a market test in one country into broadscale expansion into other countries without market testing. There are far too many variables that a test in one nation may not address regarding another (e.g., different growth rates, competitors, marketplace dynamics, etc.). Therefore, while one may be optimistic about the potential for an initiative successfully market-tested in one country to be successful in another, it is prudent to test in each major country. However, whatever we choose to do, every market expansion must have clear goals based upon market testing results and be analyzed following execution. Once again, memorialize and share the results to build knowledge.

### **Additional Considerations**

1. **Analyze, analyze, analyze:** We're not suggesting "analysis paralysis." Instead, we encourage you to seek and use feedback to learn what works and does not work for your brand. It is also critically important to determine why. According to Ann Marie Houghtailing, sought-after business development and storytelling expert, "Feedback is a free education to excellence." While the feedback we're suggesting here is not always free, it is undoubtedly invaluable education to gaining the knowledge that leads to excellence.
2. **Iterate your way to success:** What we learn at one stage of feedback informs what we need to do to move closer to improving the productivity of our marketing and achieving essential behavior objectives in the next stage. Iterating one's way to success is a best practice and represents a quality process. It is all about creating a feedback loop. Successfully executed, we are establishing a virtuous cycle where new learning leads to enhanced performance. Elton Musk states, "I believe it is very important to have a feedback loop, where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better." We believe that you should not only be thinking but measuring what you've done against predetermined criteria and adapting to iterate your way to a virtuous cycle of success.
3. **Memorialize learning:** Memorializing our learning leads us to develop the wisdom needed to generate repeat levels of high performance. Share learning within the organization to help other brands learn from the collective experiences of your and the company's brands.

Everything we do is subject to feedback that could help us grow our brands. Seek and use it to improve productivity as measured by both the impact and ROI of outcomes and create an evidence-based brand and organization. Feed(back) and grow.

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney