



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## **BARRIERS TO INNOVATION**

Bill Weintraub, Professor at the University of Colorado, previously Chief Marketing Officer at Kellogg Company, Tropicana, and Coors Brewing Company, whom I hold as a friend and advisor, emailed me regarding the previous issue of Marketing Matters: *Get Crazy to Innovate*. He asked, “Why do you believe some people are reluctant to innovate or take risks with new ideas? Is it more a lack of innate creativity or more a lack of self-confidence? Or something entirely different? I’m curious because the answer to such a question could help break down the barriers and allow for more innovation.”

Bill’s curiosity and questions took me deeper to explore potential barriers to innovation among those people we most identify—marketers. Here’s my response to Bill:

First, I don’t believe marketers perceive innovation as their role. Instead, many see it as the role of R&D, their ad agencies, technical packaging people, production managers, designers, etc. Not themselves. I harken back to Professor Peter Drucker, whom many consider the Father of Modern Management, who said:

"Because the purpose of business is to create a customer,  
the business enterprise has two—and only two—basic functions:  
marketing and innovation.  
Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs."

Unfortunately, I believe marketers perceive marketing and innovation as being mutually exclusive. However, they are not! It's not the other managers' role; it's ours!

Second, marketers are kept too busy keeping-up with basic housecleaning and participating in an endless parade of meetings. There is little time for blue-sky or blue-ocean thinking. Moreover, senior managers don't appear to challenge nor hold marketers accountable for creating innovation that will significantly bolster sales and grow market share. It's about the quantity of work versus its quality in creating impact.

Third, I’ve observed that many marketers confuse a marketing mix element, such as promotion or KOL (Key Opinion Leader) development, with an idea—the specific tactic or what they do with promotion and KOL development. So, they tend to think they’re doing their job by handling these marketing mix elements in the same ways they’ve always been managed.

This leads to yet another barrier to innovation—the fourth. Eminence- versus evidenced-based marketing. The way brands and businesses have been handled by a specific company and industry become "the standard." It's "the way we do business around here." Anyone who challenges the orthodoxy is judged as not knowing or understanding the business. Deviating from eminence-based marketing, without evidence to the contrary is alarming, especially to those senior managers weaned on orthodoxy.

Fifth, the vast majority of managers, regardless of their discipline, perceive ideas as inherently risky. They fear that they won't work. Many don't, particularly when it comes to launching new products. Therefore, it is best to shy away from pursuing innovation. It's best to say "No" to an idea since often they will fail. A Director of Marketing Research once told me, when I was a young Brand Manager, that if you're responsible for new products, it's best NOT to introduce anything. Delay, delay, delay. He reasoned that the vast majority fail, and, accordingly, he counseled, so will your career. It's no wonder why so many marketers are reluctant to pursue innovation. They're protecting their jobs.

Finally, virtually everyone wants to be accepted by their management and peers. Be a part of the team. Ideas put them outside of the group. In other words, the social pressure and the desire to belong to a team of rational, sober-minded businessmen and women who have their feet on the ground rather than their heads in the clouds is compelling.

Now it's time to appreciate the need for innovation, overcome these barriers, and *Get Crazy to Innovate*.

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