



By Richard D. Czerniawski

BARRIERS TO INNOVATION TOO

Last week I shared two musings: *Get Crazy to Innovate* and *Barriers to Innovation*. My friend, Bill Weintraub, Professor at the University of Colorado, previously Chief Marketing Officer at Kellogg Company, Tropicana, and Coors Brewing Company, shared the most recent article with members of his network. Specifically, he was interested in learning if there were other barriers, other than those I identified in *Barriers to Innovation*, that hinder marketers from innovating. Here are the responses he received that I pass along to you (parentheses are my edits and remarks):

Boston University Professor

(The barriers Richard shared are) definitely true. I think innovation should balance understanding consumers' lives and understanding what is feasible in terms of design/ technology/ materials/ development. It doesn't seem like companies envision roles or departments as needing to integrate these.

I would add that the "best and the brightest" are pursuing areas where the comp is higher (e.g., consulting, investment banking). Our students see that the vast majority of entry-level marketing jobs are crappy social media jobs, which smart people do not find engaging. (In other words, marketing is tactical and not strategic! As a result, it is not attracting the most talented people. What do you think?)

Former CMO

Good comments and I totally agreed with what was said (in *Barriers to Innovation*), one issue that wasn't mentioned that I feel contributes to the issue/problem is a) in college marketing curriculums there is no emphasis put on this area (innovation) "as a responsibility of the marketer," and b) most entry-level marketers get their "real" training at their "first/second" job where their managers don't teach or expect it "because they don't do it" so it is a continuing cycle. (Senior marketing managers should demand innovation. BIG ideas propel growth.) A very common problem is (the attitude that "my job is to 'manage' the business, not do the 'thinking,' (I wouldn't want that marketer to work on my team, nor would I want to work at a company that supports that belief.) That's what we have agencies for." (Colleges teach what marketing is not what nor how to do it!)

Having fun yet!!

Former, Pragmatic Innovation Director

Thanks for sending the article. I think there are two universal barriers to innovation: fear and

skillset/aptitude. Examining fear, I was pleased to see the author caught the notion of "fear of failure" and "nothing but downside." I would expand on his explanation and argue there are a couple of dark forces inside an organization that can exacerbate fear, and it's difficult to identify them. The first is many humans seek retribution/ accountability when innovation fails. The second is innovation "political correctness": it's where people publicly support the idea of innovation but actively undermine individual ideas in the feasibility stage—they think the idea is dumb or negatively impacts their area for cost or added risk). In bad cultures, ops, sales, and finance take quasi-glee in highlighting innovation failure and pontificating w/ 20/20 hindsight about the shortcoming of the marketing/innovation person. A strong "schadenfreude coefficient" will scare away any big ideas. (I had to look up the word "schadenfreude." It means taking pleasure in another's misfortune.) Good management seeks to minimize it. In fairness, many marketing people lack in humility when selling ideas and do a bad job of empathy on how an idea might impact another part of the company, such as operations! Operations are often put in a horrible position of being held accountable for hitting an efficiency target and then later are given an innovation project that runs slower, is expensive and full of risk, without an adjustment in their efficiency target. (As a result, they are going to fight the idea or drag their feet on it until it dies a natural death, or they can kill it.)

An area not talked about in the article is the skills/aptitude gap. I was always shocked by how many brand people were happy to "outsource" innovation to a department or agency. I concluded that most people weren't very good at it, but no one can admit "I'm not creative" or "I struggle with new ideas." These people usually hide behind a "process" or "brainstorming" or "hiring a world-class agency." If you look at Myers-Briggs testing, there is a Rainmaker Index of NT (intuitive/thinker); they are only 10% of people. NT's are likely more comfortable w/ ambiguity and uncertainty and turning that into structure and meaning. I think the most important elements of productive innovation are the ability to find competitive insights and then apply creativity against those insights. Creativity is the ability to create new, useful linkages between unusual or unrelated ideas that take advantage of that insight. There's not a good screening tool to find these people. And then if you do find them, does the organization make it okay to fail? Finding the right combination of opportunity, talent, and risk culture is why innovation is so hard.

CEO of a mid-sized WPP Chicago Agency

I agree (with the barriers identified in *Barriers to Innovation*). I think I shared the story of presenting an excellent new idea to a CMO who said, "it's great, and I love it, but with the timeline to get it to market, I won't get credit for it. The next guy will, so I'll pass."

Former, Senior Exec at Y&R—Retired

I think Richard covered the range of barriers, and sadly they do exist to varying degrees throughout industry. Too many young marketers are motivated more by fear of failure rather than the opportunity to shine. I believe service innovations and new product ideas best come from those closest to the customer's needs and wants. Not those in an R&D lab.

"Hey, Mr. R&D guy, can we make Oreos thinner for those watching their weight?"

"Can we give trash bags a pleasant fragrance to overcome the smell of the garbage?"

"Can we put our sodas in smaller cans to help mitigate the guilt?"

"Can we create a loyalty program to get customers to use our airline, hotel, credit card more often?"

We've all seen the R&D guys invent clever new products that no one wants to buy.

Close and Introspection

Marketing and innovation are not mutually exclusive. They go hand-in-hand. If we recognize barriers to innovation, we must remove them if we hope to enhance brand health and growth significantly.

Now, two questions are running through my mind that I would like for you to examine and, hopefully, share with me:

1. Do you consider innovation to be your role and responsibility as a marketer? Why or Why not?
2. What significant innovations, if any, did you originate and bring to market last year or you're in the process of bringing to market this year that (will) significantly impact(ed) sales?
3. If none, why not? What barrier(s) stood in your way?
4. What is the most daunting barrier that prevents you from innovating for your brand?

If you get a moment, I'd very much appreciate hearing your answers, most notably to question four. Thanks for your consideration.

COMING SOON – Be on the lookout for a new marketing book by Richard Czerniawski, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing.** Regardless of our current level of marketing, we can make our marketing matter more.

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