



By Richard D. Czerniawski

GETTING AND STAYING IN THE GAME

During a holiday in Barcelona, we took to the roads and headed into the mountains. My son-in-law drove us in the family Peugeot SUV. As anticipated, we weren't the only non-USA brand of automobile trafficking the highways, cities, or towns. However, I had not expected to encounter so few American brands.

There were Renaults, Citroens, and other Peugeots from France. Germany was very well represented by BMW, Audi, Mercedes-Benz, and every line of VW. From Japan, there was Mitsubishi, Nissan, Lexus, and Toyota (virtually all the taxis in Barcelona are Toyota). Fiat represented along with a couple of Ferraris. Certainly, there were Smart Cars on the road too. But I saw very few American cars.

Most notable among American vehicles was Ford—both cars and vans. However, I conclude from my observation that their market share is very, very small—like the single-digits of one hand. I came upon a couple of Teslas, a few Range Rovers, and only one GM SUV. It doesn't matter the type of vehicles—whether it be cars, SUVs, or vans—America's auto manufacturers' participation appears insignificant.

What gives? How did the American automobile industry and industrial might of Post WWII America fail to capture and hold a meaningful share level in Catalonia (where my sample was drawn)?

- Did America ever get into the game and commit itself to serve Catalan consumers?
- Or, did they choose to withdraw from the market due to an inability to make an attractive profit? If so, how is it that other countries found and continue to find the business to be attractive?
- Did the US auto industry strategically choose not to invest, or did they invest in the wrong type of vehicles failing to recognize and meet the needs of consumers from other cultures and situations?
- Have US automakers pivoted their strategic focus on yet to be launched electric and autonomous vehicles?
- Did US automakers invest in the wrong products and marketing mix elements?
- Did inferior product quality turn-off consumers?

- Did government regulation or tariffs undermine their opportunity for success? If so, how is it that other companies have been more successful than US automakers?
- Is the price point out of reach, or did our automakers merely offer a weak value proposition?
- Did they fail to secure a strong dealer network, including quality servicing?
- Did corporate hubris—which has long been a characteristic and drag on US automakers—fell the mighty?

I certainly can't answer these questions without conducting extensive research. I'm not interested in the answers that would lead to promoting American vehicles. Instead, I'm interested in learning how prominent competitors in America could fail so miserably in Catalonia and, I suspect, elsewhere in Europe and other regions of the world outside of the US. The answers are likely the same ones that account for US automakers acceding market share to foreign automakers. Probably, the answers are the same ones that thwart brand success in any industry—dumb marketing.

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 and need to make our marketing matter more.

Richard Czerniawski



Richard D. Czerniawski

1812 Yates Avenue
Pensacola, Florida 32503
847-312-8822
richardcz@bdn-intl.com
richardcz@me.com
www.bdn-intl.com