

# DISPATCHES™

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

## **INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD D. CZERNIAWSKI, AUTHOR, AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**



Q: Why the book and why now?

RDC: I believe, as the late Professor Peter Drucker opined years ago, that because the purpose of business is to create customers, its two most important functions are marketing and innovation—which, by the way, are not mutually exclusive. These functions are even more critical today as we live in what I characterize as an “age of abundance and sameness.” Customers have a plethora of choices that don't differ significantly in what they do, how they do it, and the outcomes they produce. Therefore, customers move to commoditize whole categories of products. This situation is exacerbated as we also live in an era of GAQ—Generally Accepted Quality. Unfortunately, the marketing function is being mismanaged in this age, losing its relevance.

The situation is even more acute. We've gone from bad to worse. Our nation is in a deep recession resulting from locking-down businesses and quarantining the public during the coronavirus pandemic. Companies are fighting for survival. They have fewer resources and will be scrutinizing spending, of which marketing funding and personnel are target #1 for cutbacks. If marketing can't evidence incremental line-of-sight to sales, and a favorable return on investment, then marketing funding will be slashed. Additionally, when sales and profits are falling, companies cannot afford marketing, or for that matter

any, errors. Errors cost companies dearly in both opportunity and real losses to revenue and the bottom line.

Q: What do you mean by saying marketing is losing its relevance?

RDC: When I entered marketing at Procter & Gamble in 1972, the company was a leading developer of corporate presidents. Marketing was appreciated as sound, business-building general management. We created and managed brands as we built franchises. Today, roughly only about 3% of board members are marketers. The reason for this is that marketing is perceived to be tactical. Its outcomes are not transformational but transactional at best. Finance is king. While finance managers don't create customers, they know how to make money for shareholders. On the other hand, marketing is failing to demonstrate the line-of-sight impact from strategies and initiatives to prove that they can bolster revenues beyond the short-term by creating brand loyalty.

Q: It can't be all that bad.

RDC: Well, it is. Think about it. Marketing budgets are among the first to be cut whenever sales and profits begin to lag. Perhaps a better word for "cut" is "slashed." This slashing occurs because you bring more to the bottom line—the profit line—when you cut one unit of currency from marketing's budget than increase one unit of currency in sales. When marketing can't demonstrate impact and a favorable ROI from marketing support funding, senior managers will cut budgets—with the encouragement of finance personnel. It's the responsible thing to do. Curiously, the marketing budget is slashed, yet forecasts for sales don't change. They remain the same! That ought to tell you something about marketing's perceived value in the organization. As I mentioned, given this pandemic driven recession, many companies are fighting to stay afloat and re-earn the trust of stakeholders—customers and shareholders alike. They need marketing to perform beyond executing tactics that do not evidence an impact in the marketplace.

Q: Well, then, what are critical marketing errors?

RDC: These are errors of omission and commission that reduce or negate the effectiveness of marketing in creating brand loyalty. These errors include overlooking or misusing proven principles, best practices, and quality processes. It extends to the absence of essential skills such as being able to assess and coach their work and that from support staff—like ad agencies.

Q: Can you be more specific in identifying errors?

RDC: Of course, it's what the book tackles. Perhaps, you'll purchase the book and read it to find out more (chuckling). I address supra-ordinate errors like not having a competitive, ownable, enduring brand positioning strategy. Then I go deeper into identifying common errors in creating and using positioning strategies and handling each of the positioning elements.

Q: OK, I understand now. You identify what's wrong with marketing.

RDC: Not so fast (laughing again). I also identify what constitutes "smart" marketing and how to do it. I Rx—that's pharmaceutical speak for "prescribe"—those proven principles, best practices, and quality processes for doing smart, or smarter if you prefer, marketing.

Additionally, the final part of the book provides additional practices for those who have a real interest in achieving genuine “marketing excellence.”

Q: The subtitle of the book suggests that marketers are dumb. Is that the case?

RDC: Of course not. I don't believe marketers are dumb. I'm a career marketer myself—no smarter than others in the field. However, marketers who do not practice the science and art of marketing consistently are doing “dumb marketing.” When marketers don't employ proven principles, best practices, and quality processes, leading to line-of-sight sales and creating brand loyalty, then that's dumb marketing. When marketers focus on tactics to promote transactions versus create strategies that are transformational in building brands, well, that's dumb marketing too. When marketers engage in eminence-versus evidence-based marketing—what can I say? It's dumb marketing! We need to put an end to it!

Q: Dumb is such a strong word. It could prove offensive to many marketers who don't think their marketing is dumb.

RDC: Well, I understand what you're suggesting. It might turn them off. Perhaps, it is dumb on my part to categorize marketing that way. (Laughing again.) Seriously, I certainly mean no offense to marketers or their organizations. However, I'm purposely trying to be provocative with my choice of the word “dumb.” I'm wielding the word like a keisaku—a flat wooden stick used in Zen meditation to lightly strike a meditator who has fallen asleep. It's my wake-up call to marketers—and their organizations—that they can and should be doing smart or smarter marketing.

Q: You think marketers and the marketing function are asleep?

RDC: Yes, I do. Marketers do the same things in the same ways and expect different results. They talk about marketing excellence and attend workshops intended to produce it, but they don't tackle the right things in the right ways to make a difference in the function. Take a look at the creative briefs for a collection of brands within a given organization. You're going to find different formats, calling for different elements. Worse yet, you are going to find the elements incorrectly or poorly done. Earlier, you asked for an example of dumb marketing, and I suggested you purchase a copy of my book (laughing). Well, all creative briefs should include the element Communication Behavior Objective. However, very few do and those few that do lack a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, and Time-Bound) customer behavior objective. It's inexcusable. We really do need to be awakened to doing smart marketing.

Q: For whom is this book intended?

RDC: Marketers who want to make a real difference in making their marketing matter more—not just for the sake of increasing the top line but ensuring that the right customers get the right products in the right way. Those who want to best their competitors in driving customer preference, creating brand loyalty, and, yes, striving for marketing excellence. Importantly, I believe senior managers should read this book and apply learnings to improve the marketing function and operations of their organizations. It's their responsibility to leverage marketing.

Q: Why senior managers?

RDC: They also need to wake up and realize that marketing can do more. They need to understand that the marketing function is not the problem but how it is (mis)managed. Just because marketing isn't working as required doesn't mean that marketing doesn't work. Instead, it is their marketing organization that is not firing on all cylinders. There's a need to build an evidence-based culture to apply the science and art of marketing.

Q: What makes you qualified to write this book and lecture marketers and their senior management?

RDC: (Laughing again.) I'm certainly not lecturing. Please, don't confuse my passion for marketing with lecturing. I'm sharing learning from my long and, I believe, productive career—I'm into my 48th year of marketing—so marketers and their marketing can matter more in creating brand loyalty. This was the goal with my previous two books, **CREATING BRAND LOYALTY: The Management of Power Positioning and Really Great Advertising**, and **COMPETITIVE POSITIONING: Best Practices for Creating Brand Loyalty**—co-authored with my business partner, Mike Maloney.

Additionally, I've worked with some of the most admired companies in the world and leading brands during my career. I've been fortunate to work across a broad spectrum of sectors—consumer, pharmaceutical, medical devices, insurance, finance, services, among others. I'm an ardent practitioner and student of marketing. I've also been fortunate to learn from many talented managers during my ongoing career. And, I've contributed to many brand successes.

Interestingly, leading companies hire me to help train their marketers, yet in training those marketers and their companies, they are teaching me about their brands and businesses. I enjoy learning and sharing to empower all marketers to make their marketing matter more. Now, it's up to each marketer to determine if it is of interest and what will work for her or him.

Q: Makes sense. But why is the book so pricey?

RDC: You're no less provocative with your questions than I am with my book subtitle (smiling). This book, like my previous two, is not one to be read and discarded. It is a timeless reference that the marketer will return to again and again when dealing with a specific issue. Each reading will bring new learning as the marketer dives deeper into the content within the context of his/her growing experiences. Given the cost of textbooks and marketing courses (particularly at the university level), this book is a real bargain (laughing). One last note, I'm a voracious reader. I feel if I learn one new thing from a book, or I'm inspired to take action, I've received ample value from it. As one of my reviewers noted to me, I'm very generous in sharing my hard-earned knowledge. By the way, you can purchase an e-version for about one-third of the paper-bound book price. So the book is affordable to all.

Q: Thank you for your time and for sharing your work with me. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

RDC: Certainly, read AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing and let me know what you think?

Q: I will!

RDC: Thank you.

Learn more about how to make your marketing matter more. Embrace SMART Marketing. Check out Richard's new book: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay safe and be well,  
Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

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