



By Richard D. Czerniawski

THE SECRET TO BUILDING SUCCESSFUL BRANDS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Major League Baseball season is about to begin. I'm excited about taking in a few games, here, in Pensacola. It's not MLB, but MiLB—Minor League Baseball. I will be root, root, rooting for the home team—the Blue Wahoos, a Double-A affiliate of the Miami Marlins.



The upcoming baseball season got me reminiscing of rival MLB teams raiding the Houston Astros baseball team a few seasons ago. It's not through recruiting dominant pitchers or crushing home run hitters but raiding Houston Astro "knowledge" personnel.

The May 7, 2019, Wall Street Journal article, "A Brain Drain for the Astros," by Jared Diamond, reported that other teams are poaching Astro's management. No wonder. The team's success was no secret. The Astros made three playoffs in four years and won the 2017 World Series Championship.

The secret, for now at least, is what led to the Astro's perennial success. That's what the competition wants to know and what better way to learn than by hiring away Astro senior level front office and coaching personnel.

This leads to today's musings on marketing:

1. **Innovation rules** – We are not going to create success where it doesn't exist, or is modest by our standards, by doing the same things in the same ways we've been doing them. If we seek different results, then we must do different things or do them differently. We need to

innovate. The Houston Astros have innovated. They've approached player development and other facets of the game differently than baseball in general.

2. ***People make a difference*** – Marketers are not homogenous. Similar to just about any occupation, members fall along a bell curve for performance. There will be those exceptional marketers, the top 5 – 10%, at the start of the curve; the next 80%, who constitute the "norm"; and, finally, the remaining 10 – 15% who should find another occupation. To my way of thinking the top marketers marry the science and art of marketing to create brand loyalty. Additionally, contrary to conventional thinking, people who are "different" are more likely to make more of a difference. In other words, marketers coming from other categories, not mired in the way things are or have always been, are likely to address opportunities and problems in new ways. In the case of the Houston Astros, they recruited their front office personnel from different industries. Finally, I favor marketers who dare and are eager to do "different," where and when appropriate, to demonstrate their value in taking their brands to new levels of success.
3. ***Our competitors will take action to grab a piece of that success*** – Everyone wants to get in on the action. Everyone wants to be a winner. If competitors don't have the resources or inclination to innovate, they will replicate what they believe is contributing to your success. We refer to this as being a "fast follower." Virtually every category has fast followers. One way of being a fast follower is to analyze and identify those causal factors contributing to success, and then copy them to neutralize any advantages the successful brand or company might possess. Another way to follow fast is to swipe personnel who are "in the know" from the successful organization and put them to work for their organization. This latter way is the easier course of action and is the one being employed by other baseball teams hoping to mirror the Astro's enviable success.
4. ***Make innovation a continuous process*** – We cannot rest on our laurels if we expect success to endure. Success is short-lived since, as mentioned in previous point, fast followers will spring into action to capitalize and neutralize our success. Therefore, we need to create an innovation pipeline. This pipeline includes but is about more than product developments. The pipeline must include people, ideas, practices, and processes that make a difference in generating incremental sales. Therefore, we need to fill our pipeline with "proven" ideas. It will be interesting to see what, if anything, the Astro's have "up their sleeves," which is another way of saying "in their pipeline."

A note of caution: don't be quick to depart from those specific ideas leading to success until appropriate. Sticking with what's working is not about being complacent and allowing active inertia to take hold. Instead, many marketers and their organizations grow tired of something well before it has lost its ability to generate continued growth. An example of this is where an advertising campaign has been dropped well before it lost productivity, only to be restored after a replacement campaign fails.

Also, keep in mind that it will take time before others recognize our success and appreciate the causal factors behind it. Innovation is about abandoning conventional wisdom and doing different things or doing them differently, and many people and organizations are loath to be and do "different." Therefore, we should continue to do what brings us success until that point in the s-curve where our growth rate begins to decline, or competitors have closed the gap on innovation. Then we want to be ready to spring into action with our next proven innovation to advance beyond the competition.

The secret to building successful brands and organizations is really no secret at all. It's innovation!

Raise your marketing to the next level. Read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing.** It shares learning from my nearly 50-year successful career in marketing leading brands worldwide, from a wide variety of categories from beverages to pharmaceuticals to medical devices and beyond! It identifies those critical marketing errors of omission and commission to avoid and provides fixes. Additionally, it guides marketers on achieving marketing excellence. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Peace and best wishes,

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