



By Richard D. Czerniawski

AVOID COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Thinking back to your university marketing classes, you undoubtedly were exposed to the term and concept of “cognitive dissonance.” We, marketers, might define it as *psychological discomfort of the target customer brought on by a belief or feeling that undermines the perceived value of a (potential) purchase*. It can disrupt a sale or trigger dissatisfaction following a purchase. Cognitive dissonance generates mental anguish. We must avoid cognitive dissonance if we want to (quickly) close a sale and create satisfied customers—the type of customers who will recommend your offering to others.

We typically find cognitive dissonance increases, perhaps geometrically, with high-cost goods and services. This would include the purchase of homes, autos, capital equipment, long-term service contracts, among others. The reason is the purchaser has a lot to lose financially with something that doesn’t perform up to expectations and doesn’t fulfill anticipated value. Consequently, the customer feels that s/he made a poor decision and regrets the choice. It's brought about by targeting the wrong customers, providing inconsistent, false or incomplete information about the product or service, poor performance, or a combination of these.

Many of us marketers don't give much thought to cognitive dissonance. We believe target-customers desperately need what we have to sell (e.g., oncology drugs, medical devices such as phaco capital equipment for performing cataract surgery). Or, they lust for it (e.g., the 2020 C8 Corvette Stingray Convertible to redline our adrenalin, vacation home on the lake to experience nirvana). Alternatively, the purchase price is relatively insignificant (e.g., many fast-moving consumer goods such as toothpaste) or there is no distinguishable difference in performance. However, we marketers fall short of creating brand loyalty by not acknowledging the possibility of cognitive dissonance and taking action to avoid it.

Perhaps, we should look on the bright side of marketing to bolster its impact. Instead of merely avoiding those actions that raise cognitive dissonance (noted in the second paragraph), we should seek “cognitive resonance.” I want to define cognitive resonance as *delighting target-customers by reinforcing and exceeding their expectations of perceived value and anticipated performance*. It results in a feeling that the target-customer is making/has made a terrific choice, creates brand loyalty, and gives birth to evangelists for your brand of product or service.

I'll explore what we can do to generate cognitive resonance in Monday's Marketing Matters.

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