

The "Marketing" of marketing

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You may be wondering about this strange heading* Why on earth do you need to carry out marketing of marketing? In Sri Lanka, marketing as a discipline is a relatively new one, with a history of just over 20 years. Compared to other functional heavy-weights such as Engineering, Finance and HR, Marketing is a younger brother. Hence, the importance of Marketing for business success needs to be marketed effectively, rather than left to evolve.

1. Where do we need to start?

The virtues of marketing, needs to be understood at a broad level i.e. ideally at a national level. There are many Sri Lankan products and services, that are badly in need of professional marketing, in order to be competitive globally.

Tourism, tea, rubber, handicrafts, gems and jewellery to name a few. Hence, marketing representation at policy making levels should be made mandatory. Take for an example, tourism and marketing destination "Sri Lanka". A clearly developed strategic marketing plan would be required for sustainable development in tourism.

The plan should outline the competitive differentiation of Sri Lanka, in terms of the needs of existing and potential visitors and not purely the internal needs of Sri Lanka itself. (An outward inward perspective, rather than the other way about).

How do we segment our markets? Is it based on geography alone which is a broad brush old fashioned approach or utilizing a

combination of psychographics and behavioural aspects, which are more modern segmentation variables.

How is Sri Lanka positioned as a brand? (Brand positioning). Is there a distinct positioning developed for Sri Lanka? How does this positioning differentiate Sri Lanka from other competitive destinations? These are some of the key questions that need to be answered positively, if Sri Lankan tourism is to prosper in the years to come. We have to move away from the short-term tactical orientation, to the long-term strategic orientation.

This may sound all too theoretical, but without getting the basics right, we will be left to keep fire fighting!! The economic prosperity of Sri Lanka as a nation, depends very much on how "destination Sri Lanka" is marketed. Herein lies the crux of the marketing orientation.

2. Marketing in Sri Lankan business organizations

Whilst marketing is practised quite widely in the private sector, the same cannot be said of the public sector.

Many public sector organizations would benefit immensely if the marketing concept is practised. Take for an example the Health services and the level of service provided to patients.

Patients are the customers of hospitals. Hence they should be offered a good service. But what is the reality? Transport services is another example, where the customer is treated like an essential nuisance! One can argue that transport services are heavily subsidized and customers are enjoying good value. Whilst this is correct from a price perspective, it is not

so from a service angle. The concept of customer care and satisfaction, needs to be marketed internally in public sector service organizations.

This means that employees in these organizations should be educated on the importance of marketing and customer satisfaction.

Moving onto private sector organizations, the appreciation of marketing has grown over the last 10 years.

However, there are serious misconceptions about Marketing. The most common is the confusion that prevails between marketing and sales. Organizations employ sales executives and marketing executives, and they both carry out the same job!

This clearly indicates a lack of understanding of the role of selling, within marketing, or what Marketing is all about.

The other common misconception is that customer care and service, is what Marketing is all about.

It is no doubt vital to care and provide excellent service to customers, but there are many other aspects that have to be considered, within a Marketing framework.

It is my observation, that in private sector organizations, the "Customer's voice" needs to be represented at the highest level i.e. Board of Directors.

This will only be achieved if Marketing is marketed as an essential business discipline. (Marketing is business, business is marketing). Without marketing representation at board level, it is impossible for operational marketing staff to practise marketing effectively.

The marketing culture needs to flow through an organization, starting at and from the top.

Business Reach

Exporting is essentially a trading activity and not a marketing activity. To practise international marketing requires investment in overseas markets and brand building. No doubt these require resources and a strategic perspective

Marketing professionals have a responsibility to earn respect for their profession and there is no better way than to demonstrate through work performance.

This will eventually lead to the understanding that Marketing representation at the highest levels will be beneficial to organizations.

In the pursuit of Marketing, Marketing a clear distinction needs to be drawn between the market or marketplace and marketing. Marketing is a specialist discipline and is what spe-

cialists carry out. The marketplace on the other hand, belongs to everybody in an organization. The principal player in the market is the customer and hence, the customer is everybody's responsibility. If this distinction is understood and practised, organizations would benefit immensely. Further, internal customer (employee) satisfaction levels would also be enhanced.

3. The building of world class Sri Lankan brands

The greatest benefit that Marketing offers, is the luxury of powerful brands. Take for an example Unilever and the strength of their brands such as Lux, Astra, Sunlight etc. In order to build world class brands, Sri Lankan organizations must appreciate the difference between export marketing and international marketing.

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The reality is that there are no quick fixes, in building markets and brands, specially in a global context.

Ceylon Tea or Sri Lanka Tea is undoubtedly, the best opportunity we have, to practise international marketing.

For this purpose to be achieved, Ceylon Tea needs to be marketed and not sold, in prospective overseas markets. Investments to build the brand "Ceylon/Sri Lanka Tea" have to be made and a long term perspective needs to be considered.