

Marketing strategy

Business Reach

BY PRASANNA PERERA

(Lets aggressively pursue "doing" as opposed to "talking about doing")

Someone said "if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail". It is a fact that marketing planning is not much fun. In fact, the process of planning may be more important than the plans that emerge.

Against this backdrop, the critical question is "Why plan, if you are not really serious or interested in vigorously pursuing the implementation of the plan?" Many managers are excellent planners, but poor implementers of their plans. The basic reasons to my mind are that plans are implemented through people. Therefore, if you cannot effectively manage people, for whatever the reason you will end up with a lot of paperwork, but with no tangible results.

There are in addition to the people dimension, man barriers that stand in the way of successful implementation of marketing strategies. Broadly, there are:

(a) External pressures (macro and micro environment).

(b) Internal pressures, (organisational) on the marketing function.

(c) Pressures within the marketing function.

A key environmental pressure is the social, cultural and demographic dimension. There are a variety of important and far reaching changes, taking place.

(a) There is a growth in the number of single person households.

(b) A rise in the number of two-person cohabitant households (people of the opposite sex sharing a house, often referred to as living together).

(c) An increase in group households (Three or more people of the same or opposite sex sharing expenses by living together).

(d) A slowdown in birth rates in many of the developed countries.

(e) An ageing population.

(f) Changing family structures (more working wives etc.)

(g) Late marriages, as people lay greater emphasis on higher levels of education.

If you consider the above-mentioned social and demographic changes, it is quite obvious that they will have a major impact on any strategic and/or operational marketing plans that require implementation over the next few years.

Another key environment pressure, that has an impact on the implementation of plans, is the economic environment. When implementing marketing plans, you need to take into account the changes that are likely to occur in the market place and you should consider changes in your own industry such as mergers, joint ventures etc.

Technological changes

We are also observing a dramatic change in the distribution channels, across many industries. It is not only the changes, but the power of the distribution channel members have grown in many industries. Therefore, successful implementation of plans depends on the organisation's ability, to develop and sustain cordial relationships with the distribution network. Competition is expected to

intensify across all business sectors in the next 10 years, driven by globalisation of business and the fragmentation of many markets. Competition is important to be forecasted, as no marketing strategy ever operates in a vacuum.

We have observed with disbelief in many instances, the impact that radical technological changes have brought about on many industries. Leave alone the implementation of marketing strategy, many marketing strategies developed have been made obsolete, virtually overnight. Finally a major factor in the development of technology has been its ability to reduce, if not sometimes eliminate, barriers to market entry. This factor no doubt will have a profound effect, on the implementation of marketing plans.

Before moving from external pressures that have an impact on the implementation of marketing strategy to the internal pressures, it will be relevant to briefly summarise the findings of two of the world's leading social forecasters, namely John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, published in their wonderful booklet titled "Megatrends 2000". Given below are their findings, which they claimed are likely to influence development up to the year 2000.

(a) A global economic boom.

(b) A decade of women in leadership.

(c) A religious revival.

(d) A renaissance in the arts.

(e) The privatisation of the welfare state.

(f) Free-market socialism.

(g) The rise of the Pacific rim.

(h) An age of biology.

(i) The growth of global lifestyles and nationalism.

(j) The triumph of the individual.

As we are now living in the year 2000, you will no doubt observe how accurate these forecasts on the social dimensions have been.

Potential blockages

As much as there are external pressures acting upon an organisation, there are a number of barriers, which are internal to the organisation. These internal barriers, act as significant potential blockages, to the implementation of marketing strategy.

There are several internal pressures, but we shall examine the most important. Organisational culture comes to my mind, almost instantly. It is the market or customer oriented organisation, that clearly sees the marketer's role, as the main activity, which is to focus all energies on the customer. Organisational culture is something which evolves over time and can never be expected to change in the short term. However, if organisational culture is an impediment to the successful implementation of strategy, meaningful and immediate steps will have to be taken, to facilitate the development of a

healthy organisational culture. There is unfortunately no substitute. Another important internal

the degree to which top management believes and supports the strategies. The stronger the

leadership believes in the marketing strategies, the easier it would be for the marketer to successfully implement them. Take for example the great marketing visionaries of the 20th century namely Henry Ford, Alfred P. Slogon Jr, Thomas J. Watson Jr, Akio Morita, Michael Dell, Jeff Bezos and others too numerous to mention. The quality of visionary leadership provided by these eminent businessmen, transformed their respective businesses into successful global giants.

When internal barriers are considered, the availability of resources is often forgotten, although quite obvious. However, brilliant marketing strategy, to

successfully implement it requires resources. You either have or do not have resources. It is simple as that. Without resources marketing strategies will remain partly implemented

It is the market or customer oriented organisation that clearly sees the marketer's role as the main activity which is to focus all energies on the customer. Organisational culture is something which evolves over time and can never be expected to change in the short term. However, if organisational culture is an impediment to the successful implementation of strategy meaningful and immediate steps will have to be taken to facilitate the development of a healthy organisational culture.

or non implemented. A final internal barrier, would be the functional policies, employed by an organisation. The marketing strategy is not just the strategy of the marketing department. It ought to be the strategy, which guides the entire organisations activities. As such, it should not definitely be imposed on the other functions, but rather a common ownership be created, in order to achieve greater coherence and effectiveness. After all, the customer is everyone's responsibility, not just the marketing department!

"Self-inflicted pressure"

We finally arrive at what we term "self inflicted" pressure. This is the pressure that the marketing function, puts upon itself. Needless to say, this self inflicted pressure will be a major barrier to the effective implementation of marketing strategy.

Lets examine the major pressures within marketing. The role of marketing and the Marketing Manager, will depend largely upon the organisation culture and structure. In a non-market oriented organisation, marketing tends to be synonymous with 'sales' and/or 'advertising and promotion'. As such, other managers in the organisation often have a very poor understanding of marketing and the

vital role played by marketing in satisfying customers. The second barrier within the marketing function, is the quality of marketing to interface with other functions. Marketing strategy is implemented to deliver continued satisfaction to customers. As such, if there are flaws in the implementation process, this will effect the satisfaction levels of customers. The majority of these implementation related flaws, emanate from a poor understanding that exists between marketing and the other functions, in an organisation. As such, in order to deliver customer satisfactions and thereby improve the organisation's position against competition, the entire organisation needs to operate as an effective partnership. To do this, marketing needs to interact positively with other functions within an organisation.

The success of a marketer is determined by the results delivered, through the effective implementation of strategy. To effectively implement strategy information is required and is critical.

This brings us to the final barrier within the marketing function i.e. the adequacy and quality of information. There are mainly two information flows, one from the environment and the other from internal operations. Market research is a cru-

cial area of information but unfortunately individuals in marketing, do not pay adequate attention to this area. Market research should be regarded as an essential investment in the marketplace and not considered as a cost. Good quality information, well interpreted and acted upon, will provide the launching pad for implementing winning marketing strategies. (This is of course is the dream of any marketer).

Barriers are impediments to performance, and therefore should be overcome. But the important aspect is to clearly identify what these barriers/pressures are and take effective steps to override them.

In the case of marketing strategy and the effective implementation, the barriers have been identified clearly in this article. What is left, is to devise strategies to overcome these barriers. These strategies of course will be dependant upon, different organisations.

Marketing strategies and marketing plans, which do not confront implementation realities, contain the seeds of their own failure."

The writer is a Senior marketing practitioner, as well as a senior lecturer in marketing management.