**Misunderstood Marketing**

**By Brian Jud**

One of the most misused words in the publishing business is marketing. Some people think selling is marketing, but it is not. Others think publishing is marketing, but it is not. Marketing is a distinct business philosophy that, if understood and applied properly, can help your business become more profitable.

There are four competing concepts under which publishing companies can conduct their marketing activities. These are the Publishing Concept, the Product Concept, the Selling Concept and the Marketing Concept.

**The Publishing Concept** holds that consumers will favor those titles that are widely available and low in cost. These mass-market publishers concentrate on achieving high production efficiency and wide distribution.

**The Product Concept** is the "better mousetrap" philosophy that assumes consumers will favor those titles that offer the most quality in terms of appearance and content. Here the emphasis is on cover design and writing quality.

**The Selling Concept** believes that consumers, if left alone, will ordinarily not buy enough of the publishers’ books. The company must therefore undertake an aggressive selling and promotion effort to coax readers into making a purchase. Publishers adhering to this philosophy seek to attract customers through heavy promotion that accentuates the features of the book.

These first three viewpoints focus on the needs of the company and its desire to convert a title into cash. The emphasis is on making the sale by selling what they publish rather than publishing what the market wants. This is a short-term outlook that typically leads to lower profits and possibly, eventual failure.

Conversely, **the Marketing Concept** is a long-term business philosophy contending that the key to achieving success lies in giving prospective readers what they want to read. It rests on four pillars: target market, customer needs, integrated marketing and profitability.

 

**Steps for implementing the marketing concept**

**1. Identify and define your target readers**. No publisher can sell to “everybody,” attempting to operate successfully in every market. No title is for everybody, regardless of what the author says. Publishers do best when they define their target readers, group them in segments, and implement a tailored marketing program.

A good example is a title about how to find a job. The author could say that everyone needs to get a job at some point, so the title is good for all adults. He or she might seek a heavy, broad promotional campaign selling the title’s detailed information on writing resumes and cover letters and conducting interviews successfully.

But the publisher with a marketing philosophy knows that the broad market of job-seeking adults is divided into a variety of target segments. These could include adults, college students, women, Hispanic people and blue-collar workers. Other niches that would be interested in buying career-oriented books include colleges, outplacement firms and state governments.

**2. Determine your prospective customers’ needs**. The quick analysis above points out segments with widely varying needs. So, the obvious next step is to determine what those needs are. Let’s first look at the college market, which has various buyers with diverse needs.

* College teachers are looking for books that could be used as textbooks, or for supplementary material. They need information that is presented sequentially, with discussion questions at the end of each chapter and perhaps an accompanying instructors guide.
* Students need concise, clear and inexpensive information that will give them the facts they need to find a job quickly.
* Career placement officers need to increase the number of students at their college who graduate with jobs.
* Alumni associations need to provide graduates with useful information that will increase the value of their alma mater and increase the size of donations to the school
* College bookstores want to make a profit selling books.

As you can see, buyers in any one segment have varying needs. Selling to all of them with the same literature and the same appeal will do little to increase your sales. Marketing to them, according to their individual needs, will have much better results. Understand the buyers in each of your target segments and market to them as individuals and you will sell more books.

Similarly, selling does not typically consider the differences among competitors, but marketing does. Under the selling concept a publisher may believe something such as, "my competitors all have 6" x 9" softcover books selling at $14.95, so I’ll do the same thing." The marketer knows that competition is made up of many different publishers. He or she will walk through several bookstores to evaluate the different titles. What are the different sizes, appeals, colors and prices? Visit a bookstore or conduct a simple search on Amazon.com for other titles in your category, ranked according to sales results, and look at what they offer for the price. How is your title different and better and how can you demonstrate that difference to your various target niches?

**3. Conduct integrated marketing**. The publishers adhering to the marketing concept would not end their strategizing here. They know that all parts of the marketing process must be coordinated or the results will be diluted. In fact, there are four parts that must be integrated into your marketing campaigns: the product and its distribution, price and promotion.

* **Product**. Your product may be a 6" x 9" perfect bound, softcover book. But the product of the product is what it does for the buyer. This is what you are really selling and you must decide if you are selling convenience, help, entertainment, information, etc. That is what the buyers need and for which they are willing to pay.
* **Distribution**. If you are selling your books through bookstores, a heavy sales campaign -- including an appearance on a major national TV show -- will sell very few books if they are not on the shelves in stores where your target readers shop (gift shops, supermarkets, discount stores). Also consider a direct-distribution strategy of selling to non-retail buyers in corporations, associations, schools and the military.
* **Pricing**. Pricing under the selling concept usually entails matching competitors’ prices. Marketing considers what the reader is willing to pay for the value received. This may be more (or less) than competing titles.
* **Promotion**. This is the only variable considered under the selling concept. However, the thrust and content of your promotion (including social media, publicity, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct mail and media appearances) change according to your target segment, product differences, distribution strategy and pricing. The marketer plans how these will interact and support one another for maximum effectiveness.

**4. Profitability**. The marketer understands that profitability is important, but that it should not be the objective of his or her efforts. Instead, the emphasis is on "doing the right things" instead of "doing things right." The intuitive marketer will work at performing all the tasks well that will generate profits; and then profits will come.

There is a significant difference between selling and marketing. A heavy selling campaign will of course sell some books, but it will not have the long-term-revenue impact as a targeted marketing campaign. Know to whom you are selling, what is important to them, how you can integrate all the marketing elements and then place the emphasis on doing the right things. You will sell more books and become more profitable in the process.