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MARKETING MASTERY FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES\*

by

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# **MARKETING MASTERY FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES**

## **Summary**

What do Marketing, David and Goliath, and a rice herbicide named "Propanil," have in common? This paper will not only answer this question, but also stress the importance of marketing mastery in even the smallest of enterprises. The paper also highlights examples of effective marketing that can and should be emulated by small enterprises around the world. Finally, a program of basic studies is introduced as a beginning to introduce small enterprises to the essential elements of sound marketing management.

## **Introduction**

The author has had the wonderful opportunity to travel to some ninety countries spanning the continents of North America, South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. Almost all of these trips had a commercial purpose - that to make a profit for the particular private enterprise with whom the author was employed. The difference between success and failure of all these commercial travels was marketing.

Philip Kotler, the so-called dean of U.S. marketing, once said that marketing was not a difficult subject to teach or to learn, but that it took a lifetime to master. As the author has grown in his own commercial career, this credo has become readily apparent. Marketing Mastery should be the major goal of private and public enterprises alike for such mastery separates those firms that will prosper and thrive from those that will simply just survive or more likely fail.

### **Marketing: Toward a Definition**

One of the beautiful aspects of marketing is that it not so easy to define. Some might say that this is a disadvantage, but the author differs. The multiplicity of definitions one can find in the literature is reflective of the creativity and innovativeness one finds in the field. Perhaps a favorite definition of the author's centers around the process by which a good or service progresses from a new item in the marketplace to a more commonplace item or a commodity. The goal of marketing in this process would be to somehow reverse this process and make the commodity a specialty once again. Perhaps at this point is is worth examining the first question in this paper, namely: What do David and Goliath, Propanil, and Marketing have in common?

### **Propanil Marketing: Transformation from Selling to Marketing**

Early in his career as a chemical products trader for a relatively small chemical company, the author was given the worldwide responsibility of *selling* an agricultural product generically known in the industry as "propanil." The product was an emulsifiable concentrate herbicide used to control the growth of weeds on rice plants. Not knowing much about herbicides (or for that matter rice!) the author immediately assumed that his markets would be in the Far East and Southeast Asia where rice is traditionally the main dietary staple. A relatively small bit of time spent with the chemical engineers who actually manufactured the product educated the author that rice was also grown in upland regions of the world, and that the significant markets to be pursued for our particular brand of propanil would be in both Central and South America.

A bit of background on the product revealed that it was essentially a commodity produced by the author's small company as well as the chemical giants (hence the David and Goliath scenario) Bayer (in Germany), Sumitomo (in Japan), and Rohm and Haas (in the United States). The product was a thick viscous liquid packed in fifty-five U.S. Gallon drums with a gross weight approaching 230 kilograms. The author's propanil looked the same as his competitors, smelled the same, was packaged alike, and priced similarly around the world. The only significant difference between David (the author's company) and Goliath (actually three Goliaths - Bayer, Sumitomo, and Rohm and Haas) was that each competing company, with the exception of the author's, had technical experts and soil analysts in each of their customer's rice fields. Oh yes, each of the Goliaths produced several thousand agricultural chemicals each; David only one!

The key question then: how to compete and win market share from three extremely competent and powerful multinational corporations - given limited resources in terms of size, personnel, and finances?

### **Finding the Target Market**

Since the author was given the task of selling propanil, his first item of business was to diligently set about the task of identifying customers in the international arena concentrating on the Latin America and Caribbean region. Utilizing the help of various U.S. government organizations as well as the company's own small, but well-documented, customer base, an early list of prospects was developed. This became the target market.

### **Meeting Customers Face to Face**

The next, and perhaps most crucial, step was to meet the potential customers face to face. These early meetings, although pleasant and friendly, produced no sales. However, this began to change when the author became less of a seller, and more of a listener. During this time customers began to share their needs with the author, and tell him what they really wished for. The author noticed that as the discussion began to center more on the customers' needs, the more the time spent in meetings, and eventually the business itself, became more productive and profitable.

### **From Salesman to Marketer**

At this time in his career, a subtle, but major, change in the transformation of the author began to take place as he changed from salesman to marketer. Potential customers, especially those in the smaller, developing countries of Latin America, told the author that all propanil producers were from large developed countries, and had neglected the particular market characteristics of the targeted countries. Needs were greatest in the materials handling end of the business where sophisticated cranes and other heavy equipment were severely limited and lacking. The suggestion was made on more than one occasion that the propanil be packaged in ten-gallon pails having a reduced weight of approximately forty-four kilograms which would make handling of the product much easier for the workers in both the target companies as well as those in the larger cooperatives.

After checking with key plant personnel, the author learned that the new packaging was indeed available, but would have the burden of a twenty percent premium added to the price owing to the changes necessitated by a new production line as well as the new ten-gallon pails themselves.

To his surprise, the author learned that the additional cost was not a major hindrance to finalizing business with end-users. The key concern, the major need, of the customer was a smaller, more efficient package that would interface more harmoniously with the given infrastructure of the targeted countries. Price, although important, was not the decisive variable in achieving this particular piece of business.

Another interesting development began to emerge as the author focussed more on the customer and his needs rather than the author's own company and its needs. He learned that customers objected to paying for a product that contained in it emulsifier, solvent, and water - all from the United States, and all of which could be purchased locally, and at significantly lower prices. The author and his staff had the foresight to develop a new product for the international marketplace - the raw material itself, which was a specialty chemical produced via a relatively sophisticated process, coupled with instructions on how to blend the local emulsifier, solvent, and water. Not only did this reduce the purchase price to the consumer, but also generated new small enterprises of users who made product for other local users. A significant offshoot of this new product in the marketplace was that state and federal governments began placing prohibitive duty rates on imports of the finished propanil emulsifiable concentrate, but allowed entry of the raw material on a duty-free basis. This development allowed David a major competitive advantage over his three Goliaths who were caught off-guard by the new product and the significant change in duty rates. Hence the relationship between David and Goliath, propanil, and marketing. The lessons to be learned from the above story are very important, yet very simple, for companies trying to compete against larger and financially stronger corporations.

### **No Such Thing as a Commodity**

The first lesson to be learned is that there is no such thing as a commodity. As an example, we are now seeing a frenzied world-wide competition for the bottled water market. Now, water is water is water - or is it? Some companies tout the fact that their water is better because it comes from hidden, pure underground springs. Others sing the benefits of cool clear water from fresh mountain streams. Some, like Perrier, have a distinctive, small, yet easily recognizable shaped bottle. Others in the U.S. are now being packaged in larger two-gallon sizes that conveniently fit into a large refrigerator and converts it into a home water bubbler. The point is that companies, in order to compete, must reverse the normal process of a specialty becoming a commodity by turning the commodity into a specialty. In the case of water, the producers stress location and packaging to differentiate their product. In the propanil example, packaging was also a major factor that helped differentiate the author's product from those of his competitors despite the fact that the product looked alike, smelled alike, and was priced alike.

### **Marketing Versus Selling**

A second lesson to be learned is that there is a significant difference between marketing and selling. The author was first given the job of selling propanil in the international marketplace. He started with a product in search of a customer; to be effective, he had to start with a customer in search of a product. As he became more involved with potential customers, he detected their needs and was then able to translate these needs into new products and services. The shift, subtle as it might appear, is significant. A seller starts with a product; a marketer begins with a need. If the author convinces his audience that the main activity of any enterprise is to create a customer, then he will have done a service for those small businessmen, engineers, professionals, and artisans who by virtue of their training and culture start first with a product rather than a customer need. Even the other Goliaths of the world, like IBM, Ford Motor Company, U.S. Steel, etc., have literally thousands of engineers developing wonderful products that noone will buy because they are not responsive to the needs of customers.



### **Offering the Suitable Product or Service**

Thirdly the author has pointed out that simply knowing the needs of his customers is not enough. A suitable offering must be made to satisfy the need or set of needs. In the propanil example, the sale of the raw material coupled with formulating instructions met three customer needs - the need for lower costs, the need to utilize local raw materials, and the need to expand local enterprises.

### **An Example - Apple Computer**

Perhaps a most interesting example of creating the right product offering can be found by looking at a company called Apple Computer. About ten years ago the company was nothing more than a small garage occupied by two would-be entrepreneurs who sensed the need for a small computer that would be utilized by the masses. They not only invented the offering, but coined the phrases, "Personal Computer" and "A Computer for the Rest of Us." They met consumer needs for a small, relatively easy to use, computer that would be simple to operate and fun to use. As Apple begins its second decade of operation, the company has already surpassed \$2.7 billion in sales. Such a success story should serve as an inspiration for developing countries around the world. Why did these entrepreneurs have to be from the United States when there are brilliant minds all over the planet?

## **The Marketing Mix**

Marketing does not simply end with a target market, an analysis of needs, and the creation of an offering to meet such needs. Other variables such as pricing, telling the customer about the product (promotion) and allowing the customer to conveniently purchase the product (distribution) are other essential items in what is commonly referred to as the "Marketing Mix." The Marketing Mix is a set of variables that must be constantly monitored in order to not only meet customer needs, but to keep the customer one has created. These elements of the marketing mix, also known in some circles as the "Four P's" (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place), must be constantly challenged and changed to meet the needs of an increasingly competitive global economy.

One of the problems that the author has witnessed in his trips around the world is the lack of understanding about the complexity of what entails the marketing concept. In many countries, developed and developing, managers see no difference in the terms marketing and selling. The words are viewed as synonyms. The need to help developing countries must come through an educative process - with an understanding of the basics. The process must be an ongoing one because too often a brief training program serves as a convenient excuse - "O.K., we've had our three-day marketing course, we know all there is to know." This belies the author's earlier words that marketing takes a lifetime to master.

## **The Complexity of Marketing**

One example should serve to highlight the problem. The author currently runs the International Marketing Institute (IMI) which not only conducts its annual six-week Marketing Management Program (MMP), but also creates tailor-made marketing management programs for individual companies and countries around the world. One such program, developed for a major multinational corporation in Mexico, underscores the dilemma posed by the "quick fix" that a marketing seminar alleviates all marketing inadequacies.

The company to which I refer was actually quite farsighted. It saw Mexico's membership in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) as both an opportunity and a problem. The opportunity was to make its goods competitive in international markets; the problem, inviting and having to compete against foreign competition at home. It was first agreed that a short-term, four-day program targeted at mid-level managers would be a worthwhile investment. During the course of the seminar, the CEO decided to further invest in a series of one-day seminars for himself, his company presidents, directors, and general managers. This began the process of increasing marketing awareness throughout the entire company. Several other programs on specific topics such as Market Research, Industrial Marketing, Developing a Marketing Plan, etc. were also developed. The company went ahead and formed its own Marketing Committee entrusted with reviewing market plans as well as profit plans. Despite what sounds like a progressive attitude, it now seems as if the company was almost two years ahead of itself. What it neglected to do was integrate the program on a company-wide basis from the top down. As a result a new set of plans are currently being developed to start all over again.

## **Moments of Truth**

Not too long ago, a major international airline, SAS, was losing money in a year that many other airlines made money. The result was that the president was fired, and a new man named to replace him. That man was Jan Carlsson who took charge on his first day in office by ordering his employees to replace a broken electronic baggage location sign with hand-written signs in order to help harried passengers find their suitcases. This attitude - customer driven - gave rise to a concept he termed "Moments of Truth." He felt that every interaction one of his customers had with one of his employees was a "moment of truth" - a time when that customer voted whether or not he would continue to buy the services of the airline. He further estimated that each passenger had about five or six interactions with his airline personnel on each flight taken. Based on his estimates there were perhaps fifty thousand Moments of Truth per day, or more than eighteen million Moments of Truth per year! The point is clear; the customer is constantly evaluating how well his or her real or perceived needs are being met - all the time.

## **Marketing Awareness: The Initial Step Toward Marketing Mastery**

A major issue in small enterprise success is the awareness, or lack of it, of what marketing is and what it entails. This awareness is essential if the small enterprise will succeed or fail.

Because marketing is still more of an art than a science, it suffers the problem of being universally understood and applied. Further clouding the issue is the multiplicity of definitions which one can find when trying to define the term. However, focussing on the firm's mission, the reason for being in business in the first place, should allow the small businessman his first insight into what marketing is and how it can enhance his competitiveness. His task will be made much easier if he understands that his corporate mission, above all else, *is to create a customer.*

Too often the smaller enterprise begins by *selling* which means starting with a product or service. The successful small enterprise begins by *marketing* which means starting with a customer. If it is understood that the task of any business is to create a customer, the entrepreneur has taken his first step on the road to marketing mastery.

## **Retaining The Customer You Have Created - L.L. Bean**

An example of customer-driven behavior is a family-owned mail-order house called L.L. Bean, located in the state of Maine in the northeast part of the United States. The products sold by the company are focussed on the outdoorsman - tents, hiking shoes, fishing and hunting equipment, protective camping gear, clothing, etc. Mr. Bean has a hard and fast rule that *any* item a customer wishes to return will be accepted by the company irrespective of its condition.

One particular day a clerk approached Mr. Bean with a pair of boots that looked like they had been used for years. They were well-worn and had a foul odor coming from them. The clerk insisted that Mr. Bean make an exception to his long-standing rule, and refuse to accept the boots.

Mr. Bean, nearly furious, sent the clerk flying from his office with orders to accept the boots without any further discussion. The clerk did as he was told, and eventually learned the lesson of marketing that Mr. Bean was trying to impart. A customer, even one trying to subvert the goals or policies of an established commercial enterprise, *is still a customer*. In this instance, Mr. Bean knew that the pair of boots which retailed for \$55 probably cost him about \$8, and it certainly was not worth the cost of \$8 to lose a customer. Furthermore, an interesting study recently pointed out that it cost four times as much to create a new customer than to retain an old one. Assuming the validity of this concept, the cost to Mr. Bean would have been \$32, or 400%, to find another customer. Mr. Bean realized that while the customer was waiting for his new boots, he might have purchased a new parka or hunting knife! If not this time, perhaps the next.

## **Becoming Market-Driven**

The point of the above illustration is clear - while the customer may not always be right, he is still the customer! We said earlier that the role of an enterprise, large or small, is to create a customer. It should do all it can do to keep the customer by continually monitoring the needs, desires, and wants of these customers. It can only do this if it has a market-driven mentality from the top down - irrespective of company size.

Perhaps the most common corporate need the author has witnessed over the past few years is the desire of institutions, large and small, public and private, to become market-driven. This need is coupled with the invalid assumption that the process of transformation is relatively quick and easily executed. While there are no hard and firm statistics on how long a process this might be, the author has observed that it is indeed an extremely timely one that involves constant attention to the changes in customer wants and needs.

Customers are people. People are dynamic. Their lives change; they evolve; their situations are never static. Furthermore, the environment they live in, local and global, is also forever changing. If the objective of an enterprise is to create and maintain customers, the enterprise must have both a determination and an organization geared to monitor the changes that are taking place in the marketplace on a regular, ongoing basis. Consequently, marketing plans must be continually adjusted to reflect the changes that do occur in a dynamic way. The author recalls a story where the president of Armstrong Rubber Company kept a copy of his company's one hundred page marketing plan on his person at all times. When changes in the marketplace occurred, they were duly noted in the plan, and the plan was revised accordingly. Although the marketing plan was not the only reason for Armstrong's success, it was reflective of the marketing mentality that drove the company.

### **Developing a Marketing Mentality**

How does an enterprise develop a marketing mentality in order to become market-driven? It must begin with the recognition that marketing not only makes the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful company, but that a marketing mentality creates the competitive difference in the marketplace. The author has been in numerous instances around the world where key executives see no difference between marketing and selling, and therefore, are in no position to make a long-term commitment to the marketing concept.

The author has also witnessed other situations where a CEO might become infatuated with new management philosophies that encompass marketing as the focal point, but this infatuation lasts as long as it takes the next trend or fad to develop. A long-term mentor of the author has often taught that there are/have been no dramatic changes in the marketing art; rather the words of Kotler still resound ... *marketing takes a lifetime to master!*

### **Toward Marketing Mastery**

The enterprise's goal must be marketing mastery. Mastery must begin with education, and such education can only take place if there is a clear understanding by senior management that this education must be dedicated, long-term, and viewed as an investment in the long-term development of a company's human resources. *The education must also be pervasive throughout all levels of an organization, large or small, because it is the integrated marketing effort of the entire organization that assures effective offerings that meet the well-perceived needs of the customer base.* If customer needs are not seen properly by one level of the organization, it is impossible for other levels of the organization to respond with the appropriate product or service.

Marketing education can take a series of forms from long-term to short-term, from lectures to audio-visual presentations, from academic theses to business "war stories." However, it must be instituted on a long-term, company-wide basis if it is to have a positive impact and create a market-driven environment. The Moments of Truth concept referred to earlier highlights the need for marketing mastery - that marketing is everybody's business within the company from the pilot to the baggage handler. It matters not who the customer interacts with in an organization; the point is, he is *constantly* making a judgment about the company through all the people he meets.

The rewards of a market-driven entity have been well-documented in the marketing literature. Market-driven companies are the ones that increase their share of markets, that innovate or enhance the product leadership of a competitor, that distribute their goods in the most effective manner, that promote their goods or services in a way that makes their customers listen, and that price their products in a way that develops and expands market niches. Market-driven companies receive the rewards of their marketing competence through greater competitiveness and greater profitability. Therefore it behooves the developing world to learn the marketing lessons of those in their own midst as well as those from abroad. But learning these lessons is, in itself, not enough; learning and applying the marketing concept is the necessary beginning.

### **A SMALL ENTERPRISE MARKETING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

The author proposes that small enterprises in harmony with international aid organizations (e.g., USAID, the International Labor Organization, the United Nations, etc.) pursue educational development grants that will cover at least three years of marketing management training. Each year should include three weeks of training on site; such training geared to upgrading the marketing management skills of managers from both the private and public sectors. The three-year time line would look something like this:

#### **Pre-Seminar Focus Groups**

Planning should begin with focus groups comprised of potential training participants. The purpose of focus group meetings will be to determine the pre-existing management training needs in a particular corporate or country setting, and at the same time, to gain an insight into the present and future direction of the local economy based on the feedback from these diverse groups. A draft program would then be developed and reviewed with both the sponsoring agency and the training contractor. This program will be further refined and developed in harmony with the contributing parties who made up the focus groups and the contracting agency.



### **Year One**

The first year would see a three-week course designed to transfer the basic skills of marketing to practicing managers. The purpose of this first seminar will be to invoke a comprehensive picture and understanding of what is generally known as the "Marketing Concept" and the interrelated elements of the "Marketing Mix." The program should be a combination of what might be referred to as Academic training and Consultative Training. Consultative Training is a means whereby actual corporate personnel will meet with representatives of local companies to work on current problems relating to pricing, product development, promotion, and channels of distribution.

### **Year Two**

There will again be three weeks of training but in Year Two, but they will be broken down to include a condensed two-week Basic Marketing program similar to Year One plus a one-week course in Intermediate Marketing. The Intermediate Marketing program will serve to enhance and strengthen graduates of the first course who will have already had an additional year of actual marketing experience.

### **Year Three**

Year Three will duplicate the program of Year Two, but would add a one-week course in advanced marketing management geared to Senior Executives who have already participated in earlier programs or who wish to upgrade their management skills.

### **Future Programs**

Based on the success of the above three-year model, it is hoped that the format of Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Marketing Management Programs will become institutionalized in the form of a local on-going training institute that would maintain links to the original contract training partner, but with a long-term eye to self-sufficiency. The basic administration of the annual programs would be concentrated within a major local training institution, management institute, or university in collaboration with the original contract training partner. It is the intent that any new institutional form be totally self-sustaining with administrative funding support coming from private sector industry and program support coming from an equitable fee schedule.

### **Evaluations**

Evaluations will be presented to the funding source and the local partner on a regular basis as desired by both parties. It should be the intention of the training partner to work closely with all parties so that the program itself is "market-driven," i.e., a practical seminar responsive to the needs of all participants concerned.

## **PROPOSED COURSE OUTLINE**

### **DAY 1: THE MARKETING MANAGEMENT SETTING**

- Overview of the course
- The Marketing Concept
- Strategic Marketing and Marketing Management
- The Marketing Mix

### **DAY 2: CORPORATE MARKETING PLANNING I**

- The Marketing Planning Process
- Product Mix Strategy
- Managing the Product Life Cycle
  - Domestic Market Considerations
  - International Market Considerations
- Product Development Strategies
- Competitive Analysis

### **DAY 3: PRODUCT POLICY I**

- Product Positioning Strategy
- Product Portfolio Analysis
- Overseas Market Product Strategies

### **DAY 4: PRODUCT POLICY II**

- New Product Ideas
- New Product Development
- Creative Thinking Techniques

**DAY 5: PRICING POLICY I**

- Break-Even Analysis
- Marketing Mathematics
- Creating and Reading a Balance Sheet and Profit Plan

**DAY 6: PRICING POLICY II**

- Pricing as a Strategic Tool
- Breakeven Analysis for Foreign Market Situations

**DAY 7: PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES**

- Understanding the Promotional Mix
- Using Advertising Effectively
- Budgeting Advertising
- Measuring the Effects of Advertising
- Sales Promotion as a Strategic Element

**DAY 8: EFFECTIVE SALES MANAGEMENT**

- Managing a Sales Force
- Evaluating Salesmen Effectiveness
- Sales Force Vs. Advertising as a Strategic Consideration
- Salesmen as Marketers

**DAY 9: DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY I**

- Channel-Structure Strategy
- Channel-Control Strategy

**DAY 10: DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY II**

- Managing Channel Conflict
- Foreign Market Entry Strategies

**DAY 11: PLANNING AND FORECASTING I**

- Forecasting Demand
- Environmental Monitoring
- Developing a Marketing Information System (MIS)

**DAY 12: PLANNING AND FORECASTING II**

- Linking Forecasts with Plans
- Using the Plan for Control

**DAY 13: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS I**

- Types of Organizational Structures
- Developing Superordinate Goals

**DAY 14: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS II**

- Managing Interorganizational Relationships
- Managing Human Resources

**DAY 15: CONCLUDING TOPICS**

- Marketing to the U.S. and other Developed Markets
- Direct Marketing (A Newly Revived Old Concept)
- Tying Marketing Strategy Together for Success
- Future Trends in Marketing

## **BREAKDOWN OF A TYPICAL TRAINING DAY**

<b>08:00 - 08:30</b>	<b>Group Discussion Meetings (Case Preparation)</b>
<b>08:30 - 09:30</b>	<b>Lecture I</b>
<b>09:30 - 10:45</b>	<b>Case Analysis I</b>
<b>10:45 - 11:00</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>11:00 - 12:00</b>	<b>Lecture II</b>
<b>12:00 - 13:30</b>	<b>Lunch and Case Preparation</b>
<b>13:30 - 15:00</b>	<b>Case Analysis II</b>
<b>15:00 - 15:30</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>15:30 - 16:45</b>	<b>Lecture III</b>
<b>Evening</b>	<b>Preparation of Next Day's Cases (Individual Study)</b>

## **CONCLUSION**

**Marketing is a truly exciting, innovative and creative art. It is a means by which business managers can contribute to the overall welfare of their enterprises and allow for companies to monitor the needs of their customers and to present responsive and competitive offerings to the marketplace. The lessons taught by large enterprises can be adapted by small enterprises who have developed a sense of the marketing concept and all it entails.**

**Marketing awareness can only begin with marketing knowledge, and marketing knowledge can only begin with education. The concept is simple, yet it is often forgotten or overlooked because of its simplicity. The program outlined herein is only one of many variations that can be adopted by small enterprises to educate their managers. Like the art of marketing itself, marketing education should be an ongoing process - the process of marketing mastery.**