

## **Key challenges faced by marketers in the marketing communications process.**

### **Marketing Communications**

In describing the marketing communications process, Smith and Zook (2011) advise that it utilises varied tools and disciplines to achieve predetermined outcomes. They group these into five elements (personal selling, advertising, promotion, public relations and direct marketing) where each has specialised usage characteristics that contribute to the overall process (marketing communications) (Smith and Zook; 2011; Fill, 2009).

As can be seen from the above, the marketing communications process is composed of a number of elements, most which are interdependent. These aid marketers and companies in the exploration of the shortcomings and attributes of their service or product as a basis to devise plans that result in outcomes that are successful (De Pelsmacker et al, 2007). The following segments will explore these five elements of the process and the challenges faced by marketers as a result.

### **Personal Selling Contributions to Marketing Communications**

This is the oldest and today, at times, the most effective and fastest method of generating sales depending on the product (Hollensen, 2014). In general, it is used for higher ticket complex business-to-business (B2B) sales or consumer products such as houses, vehicles and other high priced items. In terms of benefits, it provides a means to compare and contrast features for potential buyers as well as absorb the direct sale expenses and commission costs in higher price margins (Hollensen, 2014). Done properly, personal selling is cost efficient and effective. When it is either done poorly or permit sales personal the latitude to made unsupported statements or engage in deceptive practices, it can be a highly damaging communications process (Egan, 2008).

### **Understanding Advertising and Marketing Communications**

In contrast to direct selling, advertising is a process that a company can control in terms of content, delivery and statements (Shrimp and Andrews, 2012). It has the benefit of a wider reach and frequency (in terms of exposure); however these efficiencies face the problem of being lost in excessive advertising clutter in magazines, the Internet and other media that provide it with reach (Keller, 2009). The brief space or time that advertising has to capture the attention of a target prospect or communicate a message is its major shortcoming (Shrimp and Andrews, 2012). This means that for higher ticket or complex products/goods, it needs to be accompanied by personal selling of some type (Keller, 2009).

This last aspect is a failing point of advertising as it usually is a gateway to a form of personal selling unless the product is displayed on shelves where the consumer simply selects from among other choices (Keller, 2009). The above is a major weakness because whilst advertising provides reach and frequency aspects, it also does not generally conclude the sale but rather sets the stage for it.

### **Promotion Benefits and Marketing Communications**

This represents a hybrid form of advertising and mass personal selling that generally uses an important buyer behavioural trait or trigger as its key (Shrimp and Andrews, 2012). This can be based on price, quantity breaks or any other appeal that uses saving or a benefit that a potential buyer views as valuable (Shrimp and Andrews, 2012). The above value proposition is a key to this method along with the expense of setting up the promotion and the cost of providing the value aspect.

The benefit of promotions is that they can be applied to almost any type of good or service in any price range (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Consumers and B2B purchasers are aware of the fact that a promotion is seeking to sway their decision. The question is, does the offer provide enough of an incentive, or value return to cause the buying decision to be changed? In most cases, a promotion entails the company taking some type of a reduction on its profit margin that is passed along to the buyer by using price, extra features or other form(s) as the lure (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). It is these aspects that usually cause promotional efforts to generally be more successful.

### **The Contribution of Public Relations to the Marketing Communications**

P.R. efforts tend to be less obvious in today's marketing communications arsenal as the form is generally mixed in with announcements as well as company news (Dozier et al, 2013). In some cases the idea is to be obvious regarding the fact that the effort is a P.R. release, and in others it tends to be masked as an announcement of an event or product feature explanation (Rice and Atkin, 2012).

Apple makes consistent use of public relations by announcing new product conferences that are huge sales events used to tout products and services (Cornelissen, 2014). The company has been utilising this form of public communication for so long it does not seem to be P.R. but rather, information it is sharing with the public (Cornelissen, 2014). This is because Apple carefully includes other articles and blogs that coincide with these releases (Dahlen et al, 2010). By this it is meant that the company builds anticipation through product leaks months in advance that also include specs and other tidbits of information (Dahlen

et al, 2010).The trick with P.R. is that it works best when it is disseminating information as part of a story as opposed to looking and sounding like a press release.

### **Direct Marketing use in and Marketing Communications**

As has been the case with all of the previous elements discussed under marketing communications, each has their place, however some tend to be more standalone in generating results than others. Direct marketing is an element that is successful when used in combination with other marketing communication elements (Winer, 2009). By this it is meant that as a part of an advertising campaign it can aid in generating sales or follow up. Direct marketing also combines with P.R. activities that use lists generated from prior events (Winer, 2009). This aspect (meaning prior lists) is also true for some advertising efforts as well as personal selling and promotions (Smith and Zook, 2001).

Specialised emails, mobile campaigns, social media and varied forms of relationship marketing are used to refine direct marketing and have rekindled its use and relevancy in the digital age (Smith and Zook, 2001). The ability to tie in direct marketing with other communications elements represents its prime usage mode.

### **Facing the Challenges**

As brought forth in this brief exploration of the five elements of marketing communications, all but one (promotions) represent processes that primarily are used in conjunction with each other. The challenge for marketers represents achieving effectiveness, cost efficiencies and most of all simplicity. This last aspect is extremely important due to the volume of marketing efforts produced by various companies and the clutter it creates. As a result, developing a communication that resonates with consumer or business interests using savings, added features or other benefits is a potential advantage that holds the most promise.

The above leaning toward promotions as a preferred tool is due to its inclusive delivery channel to get a message across as opposed to having to combine two or more marketing communication elements. Whilst the above does not imply that other marketing communication element combinations might not achieve results, it is plausible that the more direct and concise the delivery, the higher the potential for a successful outcome.

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