

Dick Maggiore: Best marketers benefit by applying laws in their work

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By Dick Maggiore Special to The Canton Repository
(Editor's note: First in a four-part series on Jack Trout's and Al Ries' enduring book, "The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing," which followed their ground-breaking bestseller, "Positioning.")

Wouldn't it be great if there were truly immutable laws to help us with marketing our products and services?

There are laws in nature. There are laws in science. When Elon Musk tasked his engineers at SpaceX to design its rockets to withstand not only re-entry, but also return and then be reused, many in the industry gasped. They did it by strictly following the laws of physics.

Like the laws of science, there are laws in marketing. Jack Trout and Al Ries defined and organized them in their landmark book "The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing." They wrote their book about a quarter century ago.

Let's see how well they're holding up. But first, let's define marketing.

Peter Drucker, recognized as the father of business management, said, "Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two — and only two — basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs. Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business."

The last sentence is especially powerful. Marketing is charged with differentiating the company's product or service.

As they do in nature and in science, marketing laws guide strategies and bring order out of chaos so that we can move forward to productive outcomes.

No. 1: The Law of Leadership

There is a big advantage to being first in a category. We give the leader a lot of credit, deservedly so or not. We believe that if you are No. 1, you must know what you're doing. We extend more trust to the leading brand.

We also remember the first. Most remember the name of the first person to walk on the moon, Neil Armstrong. What's the name of the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic? Charles Lindbergh. The second? It was Bert Hinkler. You probably never heard of poor Bert.

How about the No. 1 acetaminophen pain reliever? Tylenol. How about the No. 2 acetaminophen maker? No clue.

Your product or service can be the largest selling. It could be the technological leader or perhaps lead in some area of performance.

To achieve leadership, consider reducing the size of your battleground, or the geography you serve. Businessweek magazine has a much larger circulation than Crain's Cleveland Business. In Cleveland, however, Crain's has a larger circulation than Businessweek and is therefore the leader in business publications in the Cleveland area.

No. 2: The Law of Category

If you can't be first in a category, set up a new category you can be first in. This is a way to differentiate.

You might not have known the second person to fly solo across the Atlantic, but you have likely heard of the third, Amelia Earhart. Why is this? It's a new subcategory. She was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

Dell wasn't the first computer company. Dell subdivided the computer category. It became the first computer company selling computers direct to businesses and soon became the largest computer company in the world. Apple's Macintosh line of computers isn't No. 2 in the desktop computing category. Rather, it's No. 1 in the graphic design computer subcategory.

Do we really need another social media platform? Pinterest thought so and subdivided the social media category into a place to save ideas for later. With about 150 million users, it's working.

No. 3: The Law of the Mind

This law should really be a caveat to law No. 1. It is not enough to be first. You must be first in the mind.

Do you remember Gablinger beer? Not many people do. Gablinger came out with the first light beer, named Gablinger's Diet Beer. Problem was, they didn't have enough money to get their brand into the consumer's mind.

Miller was watching. Miller did have the resources to get the message into the mind. They called it “Lite Beer from Miller” with a tagline, “Great Taste, Less Filling.” They won.

Facebook wasn’t the first social media platform. What happened to MySpace and Friendster? Mark Zuckerberg understood the law of the mind. He made sure that Facebook won the battle for our minds.

No. 4: The Law of Perception

At the end of the day, marketing is a battle of perceptions. Have you noticed how hard it is to find the objective reality (that which exists outside our own minds)?

Most people think they are better at perceiving the objective reality. Truth is we all see the world through our own tinted lens.

The best product doesn’t always win in the marketplace. Rather, the best perceptions in the mind win.

Most of marketing’s mistakes come from product and service battles versus the battle for the consumer’s mind. Why is Campbell’s the No. 1 soup in the United States and almost nonexistent in the United Kingdom? Why is Heinz the No. 1 soup in the U.K and almost nonexistent in the U.S.?

It’s about perceptions. Campbell’s got into minds first with soup in the United States. Heinz got into the mind first with soup in United Kingdom. It isn’t that Heinz or Campbell’s make better soups in their respective domains. Rather, it’s about the brand that got into minds first and consumers perceiving it to be best.

In all fairness, perceptions do relate to the product or service. Perceptions are very often grounded in reality. Your brand has to come through with what it promises.

“There is a great deal of advertising that is much better than the product. When that happens, all that the good advertising will do is put you out of business faster,” said famed ad man Jerry Della Femina.

In other words, brands that don’t deliver on their promise are doomed regardless of the quality of their advertising.

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