



MANAGEMENT

Marketing: Are You Doing It?

By Syed Hussain and Dan Garza, Marketing Consultants, DGPR, San Jose, CA

Marketing means different things to different people. The definition of marketing runs the gamut from handing out business cards to making sure monthly sales goals are met and on to taking customers to expensive restaurants. But it's rare in the electronics industry and particularly, in the EMS provider segment, for companies to seriously embrace marketing, organize, and execute a sustained, well orchestrated plan to achieve such business objectives as continuing market awareness and building brand preference.

Too often, companies confuse marketing with sales operations. That's to be expected because the electronics industry is highly competitive and sales goals must be achieved to remain competitive and in business. With so much attention on sales, however, marketing can be all but forgotten, although some companies make token gestures.

Disjointed Array of Tactics

In this regard, some large companies rely on a disjointed array of tools and tactics to achieve their marketing objectives. Smaller companies may use occasional promotion, but largely depend on sales and top management to communicate with customers and potential customers to bring in the business.

With so much misunderstanding, it's no wonder the industry is fraught with opinions about marketing. There are those who have successfully launched and sustained a long-term marketing strategy and are firm believers. Then, there are those who tried a marketing program, but got poor results and consequently, are no longer believers. Lastly, there's the so-called "engineering-intensive" company managements that think strategic marketing isn't necessary.

The latter fail to see or understand how a well-organized strategic marketing plan can be beneficial to the growth of their companies. Its advantages and the

opportunities it spawns for business growth are many.

To cite a few, it disciplines you to clearly define your market objectives and unique selling proposition (USP) in the market(s) you're targeting. USP means the product or service features and technologies you have that no competition has, and it is highly advantageous for your customers to have. Other key benefits include:

- Sustained market visibility to create an aura of market and technology leadership.
- Marketing lets you educate your customers and potential customers and direct them toward your products and/or services.
- Marketing provides you an avenue for explaining why customers should use your products and/or services.
- Build market credibility.
- Influence major market influentials and winning their trust and respect.
- Obtaining second and third party endorsement for your product or services.
- Cultivate or explore new markets and business opportunities.
- Create preference for your product or service.
- Build competitive barriers.
- Position your competition away from your main market target and put them in separate market categories.
- Best of all, strategic marketing helps to turbo-charge your sales efforts and increase revenues.

Let's take a closer look at these benefits. You may or may not have marketing objectives clearly defined. For instance, you may consider your monthly sales objectives as marketing. Or you may have marketing objectives loosely defined. As for USP, like many companies, you may think you've got the best product or service on the market, but you don't know for sure until you perform thorough competitive research, which is an important

part of a marketing plan. Then, you'll be in a better position to clearly define your USP and market objectives.

A Sound, Strategic Plan

The foundation of a sound, strategic plan is a carefully developed, executed, and on-going communications program directly aimed at your market audience. Your USP and value proposition should be embedded in each and every communication tool, whether it be advertising, editorial, direct mail, website content, customer case history, or technical conference paper to name a few. The end result is sustained market visibility, which, over time, creates an aura of market and technology leadership. And, as we've seen in case after case, customers are more prone to buy from vendors with perceived quality products and services than those who are unknown. As for educating customers, you can certainly do that on a one-on-one basis via sales calls. But think of how much more efficient, cost-effective, and credible you can be by communicating your key product or service messages by deploying a well-planned media program to reach hundreds of customers and potential customers. An effort like this does not take away from sales, rather it significantly bolsters it. Sales can only benefit from marketing since their common objectives are to increase revenues and market share.

Marketing communications also hands you the opportunity to explain the advantages of opting for your products and/or services. Simultaneously, it builds credibility for your company because you're obtaining highly valued editorial second- and third-party endorsement and winning the hearts and minds of market influentials, who are

exposed to your constant market messages. On the other hand, if you don't drive your market communications to position your product or service, your competition will, and trust me, they won't do a pretty job of it.

Creatively developed communication tools in a strategic marketing plan allow you to investigate new, promising markets. If you decide to go into these markets, communication tools provide you the means for cultivating and winning these new customers. Along the way, sustained communications with those markets help to create preference for your products and/or services. If you are wily enough, you can deftly create perceived competitive barriers, extol the virtues of your products, and steadily, over time, distance yourself from your competition, putting them in a separate market category than the one you're creating for yourself.

Lastly, as for generating sales, obviously that's not done directly. Strategic marketing is more of an art form than a science, and simple logic tells you, the more your customers and potential customers know about your company and the value of your products and/or services, the more they are encouraged to select and buy from you and not from companies they're unfamiliar with.

The most important benefit, however: a strategic marketing plan allows you to be the captain of your company's destiny. You're the one in control of proactively developing and executing your strategic marketing plan.

For more information, contact: DGPR, Inc., 2265 Winchester Blvd., Campbell, CA 95008.

☎408-364-0126; fax: 408-364-0372.

E-mail: dlgarza@dgpr-inc.com

Web: <http://www.dgpr-inc.com> □

