

## **People: The Highly under-rated 'P' in the Marketing-Mix**

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It always fascinates me to see how most companies give scant importance to 'people', who are an important part of the marketing mix. The 'people' aspect is delegated to the Human Resources department, thereby missing out on the real potential of an important weapon for the marketing war.

Some may argue that 'people' are part of the 'product' in the marketing mix, specifically with regard to the service industry. The people hired by Emirates Airlines to serve in the cabin crew team are the best in the industry and are attracted with the best compensation package available in the industry. They are multi-cultural, signifying the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. They are sophisticated, smart, attractive and intelligent.

There are many examples of this vital and most powerful resource being used in the 'product' aspect in manufacturing companies as well as in other elements of, the marketing mix.

'Apple' would hire people who have the 'Apple culture' in them. They need to be high tech, futuristic, innovative and bold. 3M would hire people who are creative, solution- oriented risk takers. In all these cases the people hired will add their personal qualities into the brand when they develop strategies, create products, design communications, engage in selling & delivering a 'wow' service.

With regard to the 'price' aspect of the marketing mix, the people can have an impact on price due to their ability to network and sell. A salesman selling SAP, the enterprise resource planning software, is one of the most expensive in the industry. They are expensive as they have networks at the highest level in organizations, have the expertise to understand businesses at strategic and operational levels, and the confidence to communicate with confidence at the highest level. Such qualities are needed to convince a board of a company of the strategic and operational business benefit of investing a million dollars on an SAP system. Such a salesman would be hired only by a company who has such products to sell. The same would apply to a salesman of aircraft, large infrastructure projects and high value equipment. Therefore the quality of the 'person' is an important part of the marketing mix.

With regard to the 'promotions' aspect of the marketing mix, people play a key role. According to Tom Peters, a brand is a promise and it is our people who deliver it. People deliver the brand promise when they formulate their business strategy, brainstorm ideas to bring the brand alive, develop new products in the laboratories, procure raw material for their products, in the production lines, create advertising to communicate the product, meet customers to sell products, or communicate to others about the products. Yes, people should eat, think and drink the brand whichever function they belong to!

People play an important role with regards to the ‘place’ aspect of the marketing mix. ‘Place’ is where customers buy the product. The selection of the right distribution channel that takes the product to the retail outlet is paramount, and that decision should bolster our brand. The passionate and committed team members of the Agora supermarket chain in Bangladesh lives by a set of promises titled ‘The Agora Aponjon Promise’. ‘Aponjon’ is the Bangla word for *dear one*. A few of the promises are related to how team members should conduct themselves in terms of dress code, a warm welcome with a smile, body language, vocabulary, being helpful, escorting guests to the shelves, a fond farewell and being an Ambassador of the company within and outside the work place. One of the promises which bring out this message is; “We are ladies and gentleman, and we treat our guests and each other as ladies and gentlemen”.

So we see ‘people’ play such an important role in the entire marketing mix, and hence this should be given similar importance. This may warrant having ‘people’ as one of the elements of the marketing mix. The original marketing mix was product, price, place and promotions. Thereafter many ‘P’s had been added and ‘People’ did get included at some point. However it is not clear if it is given the desired air time it deserves.

Once could argue, “Yes, we do understand the importance of people and our Human Resources [HR] division ensures we hire the right people”. Whilst the role played by HR is appreciated, I am not suggesting Marketing takes over the HR function of recruiting and training people. My point is that Marketing has to clearly define the quality of people required to bolster the brand, the type of training required to sustain their ‘brand ambassador’ role and provide inputs to HR processes to ensure this.

In summary, people play a key role (perhaps *the* key role) in building a brand and as such they should be a key element of the marketing mix. The marketer should have a key responsibility defining the people aspect, without delegating it to HR. Therefore marketers should work closely with HR in building the ambassadors of our brand - *our people*.