One of the first things any student of marketing learns is the traditional four Ps that form the basis of a marketing strategy: product, price, place and promotion. This approach was formulated by Kotler who, says Frikkie Herbst, the professor of marketing management in the faculty of management sciences at the University of Johannesburg, is widely regarded as the father of modern marketing. [See Jan/Feb issue for an overview of the Ps of marketing.]

However, Prof. Herbst prefers a slightly broader view of marketing which emphasises the primacy of the customer without diminishing the important role played by various functions within the organisation in any successful marketing strategy. Unfortunately, too many managers still think of marketing as operating only at the tactical or functional levels of the organisation, whereas it should also be incorporated into the highest levels, where the corporate vision and mission are determined.

The layman, of course, often thinks of marketing as being synonymous with advertising, yet as Ian Rheeder points out, advertising is only one part of the fourth P mentioned above, promotion. Rheeder, a chartered marketer who’s the marketing and sales manager at YKK, and who also heads up the marketing course at Damelin, says that there are a host of promotional channels available to the marketer in addition to advertising, including public relations (PR), direct marketing, sales promotions, and sponsorship marketing. And advertising can be broken up into radio, television, print media, billboards, and even, say, washroom advertisements.

Promotion, then, is the most visible element of marketing for most people, and will be the biggest focus of this feature.

**Integrating all elements**

Rheeder argues that these various elements that make up the promotional aspect of marketing need to be considered together, in terms of the concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC), if they’re to be used to full effect. He goes on to quote from a book by Zyman Zergio, ‘The End of Marketing as We Know It’, to the effect that traditional marketing is dead, and that advertising in general is overrated as part of the marketing mix.

One of the big changes that has happened in the advertising world is that the media it uses has fragmented, says Gordon Patterson, the MD of Starcom. Although his company would conventionally be known as a media placement agency, he prefers to describe it as a media insights, connections, and experience company. This is in keeping with his argument that marketers need to gain far more insight into the attitudes of consumers, and that achieving this is one of their greatest challenges.

Patterson says there is, at the moment, too much of a sales orientation, and not enough of a marketing orientation amongst marketers. Accurate identification of a product’s target market, and those niches it could best be aimed at, can only be achieved through better
consumer insights. Media fragmentation actually affords the marketer greater opportunities to target the message more accurately, but only if the consumer is well enough understood. Without that understanding, marketers run a greater risk than ever of missing the mark.

**Using research correctly**

Market research is therefore obviously vital, but too often, says David Wingfield, the chief operating officer of TBWA Hunt Lascaris, an advertising agency, isn’t used correctly. Marketing strategy can be based too much on research results instead of being carefully thought out by marketing professionals. If marketing is based on the views of consumers, he says, there’ll be little innovation, quoting Henry Ford as saying that if he’d asked consumers what they wanted, he’d have given them a faster horse.

Marketers need, instead, to inspire people, says Wingfield – which is exactly what the most famous brands do. On the other hand, when a marketing strategy becomes pedestrian, it can kill a brand in the long term.

Using research effectively can help in this regard. Morné Ebersohn, a group executive at Veracity Media Holdings, and also chairman of the public relations consultants’ chapter at PRISA, the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, says while he likes research, he hates the way it gets used. He says it often seems to be done to justify decisions already reached, and that in any case it needs to be done at more regular intervals than is usually the case in order to monitor the successes or mistakes of a marketing campaign. He complains also that there’s a particular paucity of good research into the effectiveness of PR campaigns, with much of it being strongly focused on the brand.

That, of course, is because the brand is so central to any marketing strategy. Ann Nurock, the CEO of Grey Worldwide, an advertising agency that thinks of itself as a total communications solutions company, says that her job is to ensure that clients’ brands are differentiated sufficiently so that new value is created and sales are increased. In doing this, Grey Worldwide will take a close look at the client’s business and brand objectives, and then, in terms of its marketing strategy, draw up a communications strategy.

**Creative implementation**

Dallas Glover, the strategic planning director for Grey Worldwide, adds that the creative process which follows on from this must constitute the implementation of the communications strategy. Everything must converge on the brand, with a consistent brand message being communicated across all channels. It’s therefore essential that the strategists work very closely with the creative team.

The most important thing for the strategist, says Glover, is information – about the client and the brand, but very importantly, about the consumer’s needs. Insights must then be derived from all this information, and the creative process must then deliver on these insights.

Once the creative work has been completed, dissemination occurs through various forms of media. The problem in South Africa, though, is that there are two distinct markets that need to be reached. Harry Herber, MD of The MediaShop, a media planning and buying consultancy, says the one market is established and sophisticated, the other still emerging, and less informed. The latter is the market of the future, but both have to be reached, and the media needs to adapt to this requirement.

One approach that’s proving successful is the use of sponsorships and competitions, as well as greater interactivity, in terms of which the consumer is rewarded for reacting to a marketing initiative. Clever, innovative marketing, rather than flashy marketing tricks, is what will work, says Herber, especially for the mature market, which is ad savvy, and needs to be addressed in new ways. In addition, this market is very time constrained – people lead busy lives – and these consumers need to be entertained in order to get them to pause long enough to absorb an advertisement.

**A fading line**

Another change taking place, says the MD of Citigate in Johannesburg, Karen Ballard, is that the slicing up of marketing efforts into above-the-line, below-the-line and through-the-line segments is giving way to a much more integrated marketing effort in which advertising and PR, as well as other marketing disciplines such as, for example, direct marketing, media relations, promotions and events, are being co-ordinated to deliver the marketing strategy in a far more effective way.

Citigate, a PR company within Incepta Group, a marketing and communications group of companies, is part of a new trend in which an integrated, or converged, communications service is offered to clients. This approach brings together the various marketing disciplines, says Ballard, to offer a bouquet of services from which marketers can select the most appropriate for a particular strategy.

A rise in status for the PR function has paralleled this growth in the use of integrated communications. But, says John Spira, a divisional head at communications consultancy Meropa Communications, the reputation of PR is still bedevilled by many mediocre outfits that churn out standardised press releases for every type of media. In a business to which there are no entry barriers, there are nevertheless ways in which good PR practitioners come into their own. They can put themselves in the shoes of accomplished journalists as well as smart business executives, and are therefore able to target first-class publications with relevant, well-written copy.

**A credible message**

Marcus Brewster, the CEO of Marcus Brewster Publicity, points out that effective PR writing is the particular preserve of the publicist, a specific discipline under the

“A company’s brand strategy must provide a compelling reason for people to buy its products or services.”
umbrella term PR, and argues that, as he puts it, publicity can reach those parts of the consumer that advertising cannot hope to touch. The inherent disadvantage of advertising is that its commercial purpose is obvious, and that consumers therefore place less faith in its veracity.

Publicity, on the other hand, infiltrates editorial content, and the message is consequently deemed to be far more credible, reliable, and unbiased.

Publicity also thrives on telling a story. Brewster gives the example of Viagra, which eschewed any form of advertising in its first year of launch, and yet became a massively successful product. All of its product awareness was achieved through publicity: it was mentioned in TV news bulletins around the world, and hit the headlines of every major newspaper. This kind of exposure is impossible to buy in conventional advertising terms.

PRISA’s Morné Ebersohn confirms this vital role that effective PR writing can fulfil. Too often, he says, a company will make promises in its advertisements, but fail to follow this up with credible editorial material pointing out that a promise – to improve a service, say – has been implemented. Merely saying so in further advertisements won’t carry anything like the same level of credibility.

Not just media relations
In its broader sense, PR incorporates a number of different functions such as a company’s internal communications, its corporate communications and relationship management, and also management of its events.

However, the most widely practised element of PR involves media relations, says Kim Polley, the general manager of Text 100, a technology PR consultancy. In fact, PR in South Africa sometimes focuses on media relations too much, and fails to provide the broader, more effective public relations service that could be achieved by incorporating all the other functions that might advance a client’s PR needs.

PR is also too often tagged on to the end of a marketing campaign, says Polley, though a number of the technology companies served by Text 100 are now bringing PR consultants in at the start of such campaigns, and using their services in a more sophisticated way than often used to be the case.

Meggan Quixley, a director of PR company Orange Ink, says that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often require PR services to help them advance their business interests, and yet are constrained from doing so by small budgets. She suggests that this problem could be addressed if SME owners had a clearer understanding of what exactly they wanted from their PR consultant, and by undertaking simple, cost-effective PR initiatives that can go a long way towards developing their business’ profile in the business circles within which they operate.

Effective PR
When developing a PR strategy, adds Ashley Truscott, a senior account executive with TSPR Associates, a PR company, there are some basic rules to follow to ensure its effectiveness. Firstly, understand your business objectives, and use them as the basis of the PR strategy. Then, identify who the target audience is, the most appropriate way of communicating with them, and to the extent that media is to be used, which media would provide the best coverage.

Use your PR budget as effectively as possible, says Truscott, for example by spreading the money over a number of smaller, targeted events rather than one lavish party. Be disciplined, and stick to the PR strategy. And finally, don’t ignore staff and internal communications, since staff are a company’s best ambassadors and should be well informed about the company and its products.

A marketing function that has been growing in importance is that of investor relations (IR). Debbie Brewitt, a director of Corporate Communications Consultants, says that this discipline deals specifically with the way a company presents its strategy and operations to investors, and might involve the co-ordination of financial results announcements and the organisation of investor road shows.

Larger companies will often employ their own IR personnel, possibly in addition to using the services of external consultants, but smaller listed companies will generally out source the IR function. Since it is a specialised function, most PR companies won’t provide such a service, though IR companies will frequently provide a PR service as well.

Take-aways

- Too many managers think of marketing as operating only at the tactical or functional levels.
- Marketers need to gain far more insight into the attitudes of consumers.
- A consistent brand message must be communicated across all channels.
- Good PR practitioners target first-class publications with relevant, well-written copy.
- Publicity can reach those parts of the consumer that advertising cannot hope to touch.
Driving the brand

Mention has already been made of the importance of the brand in any marketing strategy. And along with the growing status of PR, and its role in promoting the brand, it’s increasingly being understood that brand awareness isn’t simply a product of advertising, but that it’s constructed out of all the elements in the marketing mix.

Johan Bolt, the MD of Johan Bolt & Associates, a brand strategy consultancy, says that the brand, in its broadest sense, is at the heart of any business’ development of competitive advantage, and the sustain ability of that advantage. Its brand strategy must therefore be highly focused, and must provide a compelling reason for people to buy its products or services.

One thing that distinguishes companies with the most successful brands from their competition is that the entire company – its people, systems, and products – promotes the brand in everything it does. Janice Spark, a director of Idea Engineers, a brand strategy and reputation management consultancy, says that successful brands are defined by passionate CEOs, and a top management team that understands the relevance of the brand to staff behaviour as well as the customer’s experience.

The brand must not remain an abstract concept within the company, but must become a fundamental element of the business. Roles, responsibilities and rewards for employees must therefore be brand-led, says Spark, so as to create long term sustain ability for the brand.

Igniting desire

In the end, though, a strong desire amongst consumers for particular brands is what ensures their success. To ignite this desire, says Alison Tucker, the MD of insights specialists Added Value, companies need insights that will help them get under the skins of their potential consumers. Such insights can then inform strategic marketing decisions, including everything from where and how consumers should be communicated with, to what innovation and variant strategy is relevant for the brand, what copy should appear on the packaging, and what the price to value equation for the brand should be. It can also indicate who the target market should be.

In a globalising economy marketers will need to be on their toes to cope with growing levels of competition that constantly threaten the viability of their products and services. Marketing innovation will have to be their constant watchword.

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