

Looking at the Reality of Marketing

Marketing is a part of every person's ordinary life. It's always there, but so familiar that we tend to forget it. Many large organisations spend enormous sums of money on promoting their brands and really don't care too much whether they are totally honest or not. They use the 'saturation bombing' technique that focuses on a very wide range of potential customers. Upsetting a few of their millions of customers by disguised dishonesty really doesn't matter too much because the vast majority will subconsciously receive their 'good' message and not question its veracity. Examples are everywhere:

1. People fly with RyanAir! - Therefore, Marketing must work.
2. " This is our lowest ever price for this item" means "We have overcharged for this item for years. We shall still make a handsome profit, but not quite as much as before".
3. " We check prices daily to be certain we are the cheapest in the area" means "We charge as much as we possibly can without going above the other guy".
4. Tesco- "If we are more expensive than our competitors we shall give you a voucher for the difference" means "We are going to charge you a premium price. We know that if the voucher is for a small amount or you are not a regular customer, you will probably never redeem it. For larger amounts we know that a lot of the vouchers will be lost or forgotten. Any way you look at it we win by overcharging you". "Knock the overcharged amount off at the till? You've got to be kidding"! Other organisations use the "If I tell you often enough it must be true" technique. Tesco also uses the slogan "Every little helps". Clever or Stupid? "Little" is not a marketing word. People don't feel comfortable that they are getting a little. They are likely to go somewhere where they are getting more. Tesco's customers clearly did!

Virgin Atlantic is a fine example. From its inception, Virgin has always been a strong brand, with Richard Branson's image at the forefront from day one. New or newly fitted aircraft painted in a striking livery with equally striking cabin crews, gave the airline a great start. Cries of mistreatment by other airlines and battles over international slots added the sympathy card to enhance the overall effect.

Is Virgin better than other airlines? In the marketing context, whether it is better than its competitors is absolutely irrelevant. What matter is whether people believe that it is. In truth Virgin, like their competitors, still moves people around the globe in a large overcrowded metal cigar, confined to a seat that is generally the same in all aircraft and is the single item in aviation that has improved very little over the past fifty years. It may be bigger and have built-in electronics, but the part in which one sits is actually smaller than in past years and just as uncomfortable. Virgin's USP that drives their continued success and reputation is in ensuring that their check-in and cabin staff are among the very best in the industry. It comes down to the very basic marketing principle: treat your customers well and you will have the edge over your competitors. It may only be a small edge, but it could well be significant. People will travel a long way for a smile. The flight crew can

be average as can the engineering staff, but the front of house effort must always be exceptional. This brings us back to USPs. Make one of your principal USPs the way you greet and treat your customers. Exceptional treatment will bring rewards far beyond the effort that is required to provide it. In a similar vein, an American colleague always uses the example of Cheers when emphasising the benefits of customer friendliness. Why did people regularly return to Cheers? Simply because it's a place where everyone knows your name! Marketing for a small service operation like a golf club must be focused, friendly and visibly honest. The club cannot afford to upset even a single customer. Market saturation is not an option and in any event would not be cost effective. The potential market is relatively local for most products. Successful clubs will rely on members and visitors. Very successful clubs will probably achieve the differentiation by the amount of repeat business they generate. The customer you have pleased will tell his friends and will return. The customer you have displeased will tell his friends and they will probably tell their friends. None will visit or return. In Golf Club marketing only honesty is acceptable or one's reputation will suffer, much original business will be lost and repeat business will certainly not be achieved. Big business can make questionable claims and get away with it; small business cannot.

What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. These are but trifles, to be sure; but, scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable. Joseph Addison