

## MARKETING CHALLENGED TO BALANCE DATA WITH CREATIVE INSIGHT

Marketers today are caught between a rock and a hard place in their quest to balance data with creative insight to design programs that help build long-lasting, profitable customer relationships and ultimately fuel business growth.

The rock is the heightened pressure for marketers to show an ROI (read: hard, cold, quantifiable impact) as quickly as possible for any new program or campaign they devise. The hard place: the equally important ability to use their creative sides to uncover strategic insights that lead to product innovation or compelling new customer experiences.

Too many marketers are unable or unwilling to leap beyond the data to figure out how data-driven insights can be used to drive innovation and address unmet customer needs. The iPod and Swiffer mop aside, true product innovation is practically at a standstill. According to Information Resources Inc., totally “new” consumer package-goods brand introductions over the last decade have dropped to 6% from 13%, reflecting an overwhelming shift to conservative line extensions. Less than 1% of those that succeeded achieved first-year sales of over \$100 million.

Something’s amiss when today’s wealth of data doesn’t sufficiently enable and empower the marketing team to meet its mandate of driving business growth. To break through, marketers must overcome two key barriers to better balancing data and insights with pragmatism and creativity.

Start with analysis paralysis. Pressure on senior marketers to demonstrate return on investment and contribution to the bottom line has created an army of over-analytical CMOs, who can’t make a move if the data doesn’t definitively show them the way. Even Coca-Cola, despite its reams of market research and regular sales data updates, missed

capitalizing on the health-and-wellness trend, losing ground to key rivals.

On the flip side, PepsiCo’s Propel was almost shelved for not meeting initial regional sales targets. Management still believed in the overarching health and wellness trend, making some minor tweaks (modifying the messaging on the label, enhancing sampling efforts) and major adjustments (adding the Gatorade name as an endorser). Propel became, and remains, a huge success, selling over \$100 million in its first year.

The second barrier is the risk-aversion that keeps so many senior marketers from trusting their instincts to make the necessary calls to go beyond what the data tells them. Those who have overcome this aversion have reaped big rewards.

Staples achieved tremendous success by researching customers—soliciting their feedback and opinions, observing their in-store behavior, and sometimes ignoring what the data told them. This data/intuition balance led to Staples’ reorganization of the store layout, moving ink and paper (its equivalent of eggs and milk) to the front of the store to encourage impulse purchases. Over three years of embracing this new strategy,

Staples increased revenue by an average of 10%, overtook Office Depot and has not looked back.

Perhaps b-to-c marketers, experiencing an epidemic of data dependency, should study their b-to-b brethren, who are, by nature, in much closer relationships with their customers and, thus, more comfortable making balanced and intuitive leaps.

A heavier reliance on data is critical to the foundation of a more effective, customer-focused organization. But if it’s not balanced with an ability to uncover true strategic insights and shape the customer experience, marketers will miss out on the reason the research was undertaken to begin with: to break through the market clutter. ■



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ILLUSTRATION BY TOBY MORISON

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