

IDEAS + INSIGHTS

'Perception Governs Behaviour' - #1 - Impressions

A fundamental principle of successful marketing is the acknowledgement that consumer perceptions largely govern consumer behaviour. While the evidence for this maxim is overwhelming, it's a sad fact that we all too frequently ignore its importance. This is our first insight on the significance of perceptions (it certainly won't be the last) and we provide it to stimulate fresh ideas on communicating your marketing message.

Not far from where I live is one of those mega-hardware warehouses; they sell just about everything. Two themes dominate their promotional campaigns: selection and price.

Initially, I was greatly impressed by the sheer size of the place; progressively, however, my enthusiasm evaporated when, upon asking for such outlandishly rare items as a wheelbarrow on one occasion, and a poolside sun umbrella on another, and umpteen similar requirements on subsequent visits, the sales assistant would almost always furnish the insipid response, "Ah, yes, now that item *should* be arriving in store next week."

This of course assumed I was lucky enough to find a sales assistant available: the majority preferred the company of their uniformed colleagues to those of hapless customers trying to find needed items in that cavernous emporium; frequently I would stand on the perimeter of their group and try attracting attention. Almost always to no avail. In the end, it all became too hard.

My impressions of the leviathan hardware retailer could hardly be more negative, and I now give my modest custom to a small independent store, manned by a helpful, industrious proprietor. The extra I might pay is more than offset by the benefit of expert advice, cheerfully delivered, and where nothing seems to be too much trouble, even for a small-order consumer like me.

This simple, personal story underscores an immutable truth about all consumers, in all places, at all times: *perception governs behaviour*.

It works the other way, too, of course. When we find a service or product we like, we happily give our patronage - not only that, but we tell others as well.

You are sure to have your own anecdotes, citing both positive and negative perceptions. Quite apart from your stories, the empirical evidence is embodied within just about everything you consume: your

favourite restaurant, entertainment, travel agent, author, beverage, web-site, and politics - the list is endless because it reflects everything you do as a consumer.

In business we are constantly creating impressions: of integrity, of service standards, of product performance ... in short, of fulfilling the promises, both implicit and explicit, that we make to consumers. The impressions translate into consumer perceptions - and those perceptions determine how consumers behave, and whether they are attracted to, or deterred from, spending their money.

Improving perceptions in a business is neither difficult nor expensive; with a dash of energy, a pinch of enterprise, and a jigger of discipline, we can all perform an audit on key areas of the business that intersect with consumers to discover just what impressions we deliver to them.

We've been doing this for years for our clients, and with exceptional results: from uncovering unintended negative messages ('We had no idea this was happening!') to ways of enhancing positive aspects. Our method is simple:

- we conduct an independent and objective survey of customers on behalf of clients over a short period each year;
- results are presented in a brief report and discussed with a view to correcting negatives where they exist, and enhancing the positives;
- we then ensure that our clients' marketing communications draw upon the findings to develop powerful new-business and client-retention strategies.

The result is that client perceptions vastly improve, in turn positively influencing client behaviour. Thus both parties profit greatly from the exercise.

If you want proof that perception really does govern behaviour, give us a call.

