

Idea leadership – the future of marketing?

Ken Hudson says the creation and distribution of information is only half the story when it comes to establishing your company's leadership in the marketplace.

New perspectives and mindsets are required to transform information into ideas and workable concepts. It is a paradox that most organisations today are becoming information rich yet idea poor. Consider the following scenarios.

THE STATUS QUO

In this situation existing information is matched with existing perspectives. This used to be the situation with the packaged goods industry in the 1970s and 1980s. The large players continued to win because they had the largest budgets and slavishly followed the formula of mass production, mass distribution and mass advertising.

Because of their success, the large companies were closed to new information. So long as changes to their environment were small and incremental no new perspectives were needed or heeded.

SHORT TERM ADVANTAGE

In this situation, new perspectives have been applied to existing information. Let's consider some examples:

Existing Information	New Perspective
Petrol margins are declining.	Service stations are becoming alternative shopping destinations.
Oral B toothbrush sales are declining.	They decide they are in the Oral Care business (eg floss, mouthwash) not just the toothbrush business.
Swiss Watches are under threat from cheaper, Japanese products.	Swatch view watches as fashion items not just having a functional use.

In each case, the information was available to all the players in the marketplace yet what was needed was a new perspective. However, this new perspective provided a short-term advantage only. For example, now there are many more competitors than Swatch in the fashion end of the watch market.

Note that in these examples how a new perspective emerged when the current business was under threat. But why wait until there is a problem?

THE MINDSET TRAP

This is a scenario that too often occurs to individuals, teams and organisations. New information becomes available yet the prevail-

ing mindset is so strong that the new information is ignored completely or its importance discounted.

IDEA LEADERSHIP

This is the ideal position. Fortunately it is open to every player in every category and every industry. A one-off idea can be copied but it is much harder to copy a continuous stream of new, different and valuable ideas.

Idea leadership and ultimately market leadership can be achieved by those organisations that can consistently combine new information with new perspectives and insights.

NEW PERSPECTIVE

Creating a new perspective requires imagination and intuition. It provides the magic to transform information into workable concepts. While some luck is required there are specific actions marketing leaders can take to improve the odds of creating a new perspective.

Searching for ideas should be an on-going active process involving the total organisation. It should not be a once-off event. The emphasis is on creating opportunities rather than resolving current problems.

- Look outside your industry. For example, the banks instead of evaluating each other, should be looking at what Harley Davidson does to engender customer loyalty.
- Listen more closely to the young, the people who have just joined the organisation and those furthest from head office.
- Design more interactions. A creative organisation has more creative interactions.
- Encourage the tolerance of different perspectives.
- Listen to people outside your organisation.
- Ask new questions. For example, What are the opportunities of an ageing population? How can I make my product stand out against all the products at the supermarket?

Idea leadership will require new skills, mindset and behaviours.

You will know you have developed a good idea evaluation system when you know as much about your ideas as you currently know about this month's sales results and market share movements.

Building idea leadership in your category or industry is the most challenging task of marketing practitioners today.

Continuously transforming information into ideas and workable concepts is the new way of creating value for brands and businesses. ■



Ken Hudson is the principal of The Original Thinking Co. (02 9665 6762) and is running a number of seminars on Marketing Creativity with the University of Technology, Sydney. Phone 02 9514 3529 for details.