

Frenemies: Bringing the outside in

Many of us will probably have been exposed to the argument that we should put market penetration ahead of customer loyalty in our plans for business development. Marketing science Professors Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk have led the charge with their “How Brands Grow” books, but how many of us have stretched this thought process to its’ logical conclusion?



At grasp, we conduct primary research to support our clients’ sales growth, profit development and/or diversification. This work involves us undertaking our own in-house recruitment for vox pops, focus groups, interviews and online surveys. One benefit of undertaking our own recruitment is that we can report back on who doesn’t take part.

Being mindful of non-participants provides critical insights into people who are left cold by either the research process or the market spaces we are researching ... sometimes both. We use a range of tactics to counter the reticence of some people to take part in research. We also try to draw as much value as we can from the consumers and shoppers who still say “no” to taking part because they do not engage in the specific market we are exploring. Experience tells us these individuals can often be useful starting points for business development opportunities, for example ...

A decade before flexitarianism was a “thing”, we had a lot of people telling us they would not take part in meat research because they didn’t eat meat. Years before free-from had exploded, we had a lot of people telling us they didn’t buy convenience foods because they contained allergens that they would not consume. Well before Blue Planet II hit the airwaves, we had shoppers telling us their local council would not recycle clear plastic and it was starting to make them think twice about buying into some very mainstream categories.

Our point is this: if you really do want to grow your brand, your business, your category or “marketspace” listen attentively to some of your biggest detractors. In our increasingly

diverse world, what starts on the fringe of your business model, can often eat right into your market.

It would be unhealthy to fill your team with “yes” people, so why is so much research filled with “yes” participants? We also have to face up to the difficult truth that the bulk of new launches fail and even successful new products and services risk cannibalising incumbents. This begs the question: why risk duplication by appealing to exactly the same audience as existing offerings? What better way to grow a category than to successfully address the concerns of those who increasingly reject the category proposition?

It is so easy to get hooked into customer service and trying to give your current, core audience more of what you “know” they want. It is healthy to take stock of your market position on a regular basis:

- 1) Who are you NOT dealing with? Think in terms of consumers, shoppers, customers within channels, whole channels themselves and ... even countries!?
- 2) Why are you not dealing with these people? There are likely to be valid reasons but it is worth writing these barriers down and contemplating the value each opportunity is likely to deliver (now & over time) ...
- 3) How could your organisation tackle the barriers to each opportunity? Once you have a good idea of the size of the task in delivering each opportunity you are in a position to prioritise your actions.

If you need someone to facilitate this process internally, get a fresh pair of eyes on your challenges, provide a business development database, or to gather insights from consumers & shoppers ... grasp would be happy to hear from you!

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