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**World Wide Web Marketing Practices
And Its
Information Requirements**

Introduction

The lengthy history of human trading and selling was transformed at the turn of the twentieth century by innovative transport methods. Networked rail systems and motorized vehicles enabled quicker transfer of goods. Newspapers could advertise goods directly to the consumer and those ads could reach the consumer in a timely manner. The close of the twentieth century brought a precision of delivery for the product and the message that could not be anticipated at the opening of the century. The network of computers reaching directly into homes and businesses has not transformed the durable goods marketing completely, but rather created a need to fine-tune the message to the individualized market, despite its ability to communicate en mass. Marketing no longer solely speaks to a collective audience but rather to the individual consumer or business through massive data collection techniques, such as data mining. This market need has created a wealth of opportunity for the information providers, both in product and delivery method.

Focusing on individual consumers and the increasingly competitive atmosphere on the World Wide Web as ever increasing numbers of clients wish to promote to those individuals, has created an impressive marketplace for accurate information on which to base business decisions. Individualization of marketing schemes has served to fragment the target markets, creating a need to strengthen existing customer relationships. For successful marketing on the WWW, creating a memorable presence is difficult without the benefit of known factors about the clients. To attract a customer into a relationship, the marketing message must promote to the needs or wants of the consumer in the timely placement of the product to the consumer and match a pricing structure that the consumer

finds enticing. Achieving this individualistic mix of marketing can only be achieved using accurate information about the customer to create a customized offer.

Product

While information products can range from precise research about target audiences, to reports on the profitability of a particular industry by using Internet marketing, several factors are permeating the area of internet marketing. Information providers as well as the business clients they reach must uphold reliability, in accuracy and performance. The Internet provides an extremely efficient way for information to be accessed and delivered. Thus, competition abounds for packaging information for delivery. The significant aspect of an information product that sets it apart from the competition is the accuracy of content and speed of delivery. “Two key changes to business expectations have occurred: (1) intensified development timeframes and (2) the need for tailored and pervasive solutions.” (Cash, 2004). Information products designed for business needs must extract their data from current sources. This requirement has produced a further information need in the existence of on-line databases that are perpetually updated with relevant data. The range of information products essential to business needs mirrors the information life cycle. Accessible databases, trained specialists to interpret the data, reports of their findings, the ability to make the reports secure, the ability to disseminate the reports and the ability to dissociate from no longer relevant information are all areas of need that create opportunities for creation of specialized information products for business, non – profits and consumers.

Non-business consumers of information products have benefited significantly from the Internet as a delivery method of databases, written material, audio information and video products on demand. As information products stray from their historical structure, methods of pricing are changing too.

Pricing

Elimination of product middle handlers, through use of direct marketing to the consumer via the WWW is a cost saving proposition for manufacturers of all products. However, for information products and those that create the product, the Internet presents an unprecedented opportunity to inexpensively market directly to an audience. Questions surrounding the pricing of information products range from should scientists publish their findings on the web for all to see, inexpensively? Alternatively, should they continue to publish in expensive peer-reviewed journals, which have a decreased audience? Should the price of a product be decreased since the cost of publishing is less on the Internet? This dilemma exists for retail sellers on the Internet also. “Land’s End sells 90 percent of its products at full price – both online and in Sears stores.” (DesMarteau, 2005). The company recognizes the need to have their e-sales as a partnered side to their more traditional sales methods. If one facet of their method of promotion succeeds, it is often at the expense of another facet, not the competition. The extensive use of competitive price discounting to the consumer downgrades the product value and lessens the long-term viability of the relationship with the consumer. Another retail method of pricing is to reward loyal customers with extra buying power, discounts or reward points. This tiered level pricing is used extensively throughout the travel industry and is making inroads into internet-based business.

Place

Along with the change in distribution method the Internet provides, a change in the placement of marketing messages made possible. As an example, Apple's iTunes freely distributes a music program, which enables Apple to deliver advertising to a consumer segment even if the consumer is not actively purchasing songs for the program. They create a placement for advertising of their varied products by creating a connection with the consumer who likes music by initiating an exchange relationship through gifts, in the form of free programs. Placement decisions no longer must adhere to geography, bricks, and mortar, thus enabling content to be marketed to audiences by interest. Interest can be determined by on-line demographics and marketers can create affiliations with entities for mutual benefit. The web site Ancestry.com offers payment or trade agreements to the owners of personal genealogical websites in exchange for advertising. They also have created preformatted websites for sale that link directly into Ancestry's website. Prime consideration for placement on the Internet today is the ability for a search engine to display the information product because of a variety of searches. Simple name recognition must be enhanced by product description. Placement of the information product is undergoing a trend on the WWW towards targeting the consumer with a custom message once the customer makes the initial contact. Websites are tailoring their sites to change according to the viewer. "As the Internet matures as a business channel, we're seeing a trend toward creating different Web site experiences for different customer segments." (Crump, 2005) Ray Crump also notes that Internet marketing has matured and now realizes that an integrated approach to product placement is a means to

customer service. If a televised advertisement is viewed, the customer might then go online to search out a website. The WWW has become a necessary facet of placement, but it does not stand alone for most businesses, but rather enhances the possibilities for initiating customer relationships.

Promotion

Inherent risk in the highly competitive e-commerce marketplace is the inability to hold onto customers once they are targeted and an exchange is initiated. This is also true for established customer relationships. Consumers have the ability to easily compare prices and descriptions of products and then flee to a competitor. This is a factor fueling an era of product promotion based upon not only the customers' needs but also their wants. Ensuring pleasant experiences with the provider is bringing customer service to the forefront of product promotion instead of leaving it to service dissatisfied customers after product sale. Essential to successful E-commerce product promotion is Web presence. A well-designed website that is easy to use, with a good search engine, is vital for promoting the initial image of the product and company. Assuring the customers' ease of relevant information retrieval and then meeting their pricing and quality objectives as a base for further contact. Branding of the company in the consumers' minds has led to the use of logos in E-commerce, to assure the consumer of an expected positive experience when encountering the brand.

Another method of promotion is price discounting to web buyers, and price discounting to loyal customers. J C Penny aggressively rewards its Gold Card holders with free shipping, percentage discounts in store and online, and cardholder only extra

shopping hours. They successfully use a hybrid approach to bolster both on-line and in store sales.

Profile

The fifth P of the marketing mix is called Profile, People, or any other number of nouns. The debate over standards and hierarchy for a marketing mix rages in articles and on blogs. Wherever the fifth P ends up in this debate is irrelevant, as the profile of the consumer is extremely important in deciding product, placement, and promotion and pricing in marketing. Demographics show a consumer who is multifaceted and geographically independent. Segmentation must include variables of interest, practice and affordability as well as past loyalty and traditional audiences. Profiling the targeted customer segment requires precise analysis of current information. A customer orientation is vital not only for present sales but also for accruing information about customer interests through the encouragement of feedback. Research enables the company to react to competition and to keep abreast of the consumers' needs and wants.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of business, the use of product identification, pricing, promotion, and placement has provided a solid basis for a marketing formula. The identified difference between traditional business and E-commerce is the mode of delivery that affects every segment of marketing. Perhaps the most controversial change in marketing on the WWW is recognition that the consumer is no longer a complacent captive in the chain of events leading to profitability. The empowerment of persons by

the internet has lead to communities of like-minded individuals whose needs and wants are not categorized by traditional methods of demographics. The challenge for information providers will be to provide business, non-profits, and the consumer with accurate assessments of human behavior, needs and wants under present day conditions, while identifying future probable trends. This style of evaluation requires a cross discipline approach utilizing the collective knowledge of human psychology, business, computer science, and a host of other disciplines. The human race no longer is separated by geography; business can no longer afford to be separated from the individual that affords its continuation. Information, education, awareness and knowledge are now subsets of every endeavor in business and the channels of information acquisition will continue to increase as long as the providers drive for accuracy, currency and attentiveness in their products.

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