

How well do marketers really know their business?


Most traditional marketers today come armed with a toolkit full of knowledge, skills and techniques. They carry their kit from business to business, applying it to each new brand using the same techniques but in a variety of different ways – that’s what they are good at!

But whilst they may be good at the fundamentals, how many marketers really get under the skin of the brand they are marketing? How well do they understand the history, how the business operates, how products are developed and how customers really feel about the people they deal with?

Getting to know a new business can take years, by which time for many marketers it’s time to move on. Many try and fail to learn more but they are met by walls and blocked by people who ask ‘what’s it got to do with marketing?’

Understanding business management, operations, processes, departmental functions, supply chain, and how all the cogs of the business works, can help marketers to unlock incredibly valuable information, allowing them to open new doors and react quickly to protect the brand.

So how can marketers gain a better insight into the business quickly and learn what really goes on from the top to the bottom?



Begin with the WHY

Offering a clear explanation at the outset will save you time and a great deal of pain. As a marketer you need to ask questions and so long as you explain why you need to know and the benefits to you and business, the barriers will begin to be lowered.

Explain the WHAT

What are you trying to achieve? Well that's simple – you want to learn how the business operates, how decisions are made, how designs are conceived, the operational process, the sales process, quality processes, etc. You want to understand whether the brand is considered at all stages, whether there are technical details that are undersold, whether the skills held within the business are undersold.

You want to learn how open people are to new ideas, how they treat staff, what training is offered, health and safety policies and how HR recruit staff and the issues they face.


Understanding the sales process can be a real eye-opener and enable you to learn how different personalities affect sales and identify advocates that have an appreciation for sales and marketing working closely and beneficially together.

To understand your customers you need to meet them because until you do, they are faceless numbers. You want to understand how they interact with staff, what motivates them, what they value, what their issues are and so on. Questionnaires only reveal so much, but going out and meeting them can change your entire outlook at in turn, change the way you market products and communicate.

HOW do you achieve this?

Having explained why you want to learn more, you know need to do the leg work. Ask to be invited to monthly sales meeting, even for only part of it. Ask to attend design and operational meetings, request copies of minutes of meetings, interview staff, interview stakeholders, meet distributors and partners and arrange meetings with customers, both key accounts and a selection of new accounts.

Draw up a list of questions and be sure to take notes (lots of notes) as you will need to decipher a great deal of information. Try to pull out those things that don't appear to be talked about, specialisms or services. Identify areas that matter more to customers as opposed to what matters to the sales teams. Ask questions such as 'why don't you tell anyone about this'? There may be a very good reason but then again, they may not have even considered that a particular thing has any potential value.



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Use what you learn

Finally, after months of painstaking research, door knocking and of course, managing the day job, it's important that you write up what you've learnt and use it effectively. Understanding the business from top to bottom can allow you to unlock the true potential of the brand and once you do this successfully you will find all future doors wide open

The Product Marketing Company is a successful full service B2B marketing outsource service for the manufacturing and engineering sectors.

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