

The Magic of Marketing

An excerpt from 'T-Shirts and Suits: A Guide to the Business of Creativity' by David Parrish



The real meaning of marketing is not about advertising and selling but choosing the right customers in the first place, then being prepared to put them at the centre and build your business around their requirements, listen to them and respond to their changing needs.

‘
not
all
customers
are
good
customers
’

‘Marketing’ isn’t just a posh word for ‘selling’. It’s much more radical than that. Marketing in its widest and best sense is about aligning your whole business to the changing needs of your customers.

The Marketing Problem

Oscar Wilde wrote: “The play was a great success but the audience was a total failure.” Some people tell me their business is fine – the problem is the customers! Usually a lack of them. The ‘marketing problem’ they claim to have is that they cannot convince people to buy their things. Their real problem is that their business is built around themselves and their products or services, not around customers’ needs. They do their thing in a customer-free zone, a kind of creative vacuum. They are product-focused, not customer-focused. Then they hope that some marketing magic will sell it. It’s as if they believe marketing is a kind of magic dust that clever marketers can sprinkle onto any old product or service to make it sell like hot cakes to anyone.

Successful creative enterprises are truly customer-focused, not in the sense of putting customers in their sights (as if firing products at them), but putting the customer at the centre of their universe so that their entire business revolves around them. It’s a fundamentally different philosophy.

It’s a shift of thinking, from **How can we sell what we want to create?** to **How can we use our creativity to provide what customers want to buy?**

The word ‘marketing’ encompasses both science and art as well as a wide range of skills, but essentially it can be separated into strategic marketing and operational marketing.

Strategic and Operational Marketing

Operational marketing is the more visible side: advertising, PR and selling that is about communicating towards customers, telling them about products and services. Strategic marketing concerns itself with deciding what products and services to produce in the first place, based on customers’ changing needs. It is responsible for aligning the whole organisation around the needs of particular customers. It’s crucial that strategic marketing comes first because unless your initial business formula is right – matching particular products and services with selected customers profitably – then operational marketing will fail, no matter how clever (or creative) the advertising.

The strategic marketing formula includes decisions about which customers to serve. This is not a matter of opportunism but at the heart of your business formula and route to success.

Customer Focus

Selecting the right customers in the first place is an essential element of any successful business formula. Then organising your enterprise around the changing needs of these selected clients or market segments is what marketing really means. In other words, putting customers first – at the beginning of the business process, not at the end. **Customers’ needs have to be the whole point of the business from beginning to end.** That’s why David Packard co-founder of Hewlett Packard famously said: “Marketing is too important to be left just to the marketing department.” Marketing is the responsibility of the whole business, not just the sales people at the end of the line.

The most strategically focused businesses have a list of target clients that they have identified as fitting in with their business strategy. David Ogilvy, founder of advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather wrote in his book *Confessions of an Advertising Man* how he built up his business by targeting clients and focused

‘
successful
creative
enterprises
are
truly
customer
focused
’

on getting their accounts at all costs. Ogilvy and Mather’s client list over 50 years includes names such as American Express, Ford, Shell, Barbie, Kodak, IBM, Dove and Maxwell House. For examples of other creative businesses that have targeted specific customers see [Sharon Mutch, Peppered Sprout](#) and the [Mando Group](#).

Marketing is definitely not a matter of trying to ‘please all the customers all the time’, but selecting the customers you can partner with most effectively and profitably, matching their needs with your creative skills. Just as business strategy includes deciding what not to do, strategic marketing includes deciding which customers not to deal with. Not all customers are good customers. Trying to focus on every possible customer is not being focused at all!

Segmenting the Market

Market Segmentation is the process of dividing potential customers into groups with similar characteristics – perhaps geography, gender, age, needs, industry, or whatever is most useful or relevant. Analysing customer segments allows clear decisions to be made about prioritising target segments and deciding which types of customers to avoid because they do not fit the specification of your business formula. It can also help with operational marketing as each segment’s similar characteristics can help to identify the most effective media channels to use to approach each group. One particularly useful way of segmenting customers is based on the media they read and watch, since this also automatically indicates which advertising media to use.

Existing customers are a useful resource, because analysing their characteristics can help you understand which market segments you can work with best. Despite the strategic approach advocated here, your customer base may have developed more by accident than by design. And your current customers may help you to understand your business strengths and weaknesses – if you ask them.

Furthermore, it’s easier and cheaper (up to five times as much, it is said) to win more business from existing clients compared to winning new customers. Take care of them!

In addition, existing customers can be the route to new clients. Word of mouth is the best advertising (and the cheapest) so encourage it to happen if it leads to the right kind of customer.

Listening to Customers

So if customers are the whole point of the business, from beginning to end, it’s clearly not enough simply to talk at them at the end, but to listen to them from the beginning. Marketing is a dialogue, not a monologue. **Listening to customers** has many dimensions but it is primarily an attitude towards customers as active partners, not passive targets. This involves looking at things from the customers’ point of view.

Marketing can be described as ‘being close to the customer’ and it includes **market research** but not only the stereotypical market research (which makes me think of avoiding eye contact with people carrying clipboards in the high street and those annoying unwanted phone calls when I’m watching TV). There are many ways of listening to customers and looking at things from the customers’ point of view if you want to. If you really want to know about markets and customers, you can find out through various means, indirect and direct. As well as direct (primary) research, market research also includes secondary (desk) research using published data from industry analyses, government statistics and trade journals, much of which is available in libraries or on the Internet.

More directly you can visit customers, invite them to focus groups, and watch them use your product (or a competitor’s). Visit them to see how they work. Get customers involved in new product development as [New Mind](#) do. Explore how you can help their businesses develop. Last but not least, listen to them and establish a dialogue through feedback

‘
look
at
things
from
the
customers'
point
of
view
’

mechanisms, focus groups, suggestions boxes, or over a lunch. Buy them a drink and get to know them. In return you'll get their good ideas and loyalty.

Sometimes insights emerge about what customers are really buying, which may not be what you think you are selling them. For example the apocryphal tales of the beer that was bought only because the empty can made an excellent oil lamp in Africa; the bookstore that found nobody returned the voucher placed deep inside the Booker Prize-winning novel because in reality people bought it to leave on their coffee table to impress their friends. Such unsettling observations help you to see things from the customer's point of view.

Ask yourself: What do you know about your current customers, lost customers and target customers? **What would you ideally like to know?** Devise a way of finding out.

Operational Marketing

If you get your strategic marketing right, then operational marketing becomes much easier. In other words, if you have devised a business formula around a natural fit between selected customers and the products they want, at the right price, then advertising and promotion becomes more a matter of informing them rather than coercing them. There's no need for cold calling or hard selling if you've listened to customers all along and they've been included in the project from the start. On the other hand, even the most persuasive (or 'creative') advertising will not sell a product if it's not what the customers want and at the right price.

The Marketing Mix is a blend of the **Four Ps of Marketing**: Product, Price, Promotion and Place. (Place really means Distribution but '3 Ps and a D' doesn't have the same ring to it.) These four controllable elements can be blended in different ways to maximise sales – so long as the product is right for the carefully selected target market.

Promotion is actually just one aspect of the marketing mix but it's what people often mean when they use the term 'marketing' as shorthand for advertising, public relations (PR) or other channels of marketing communications including direct mail and attending trade shows. All of these are essentially about getting the right message to the right people in the most effective way, emphasising **benefits not features**.

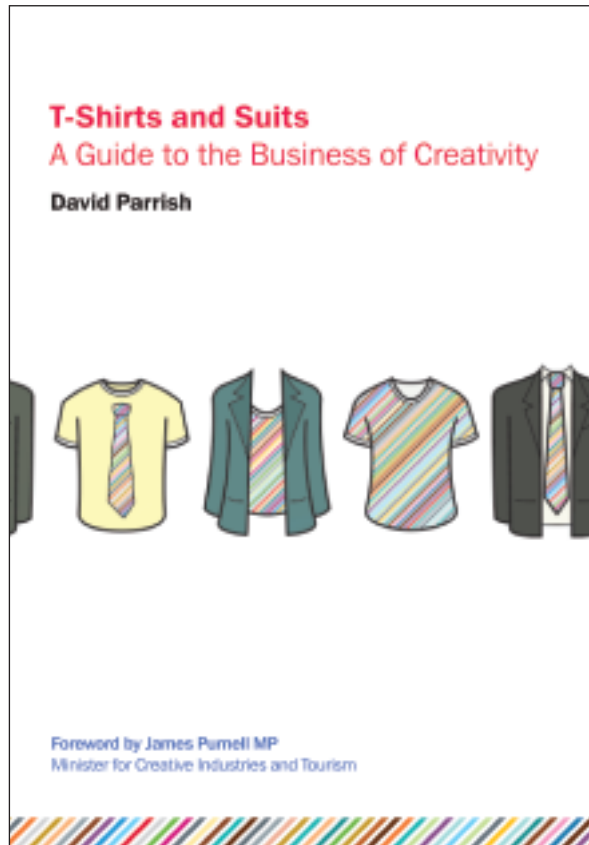
Operational marketing is always limited by budgets and that budget can be very small indeed, especially for new creative businesses. Sometimes, however, the cheapest is the best – word of mouth recommendations for example – so encourage this to happen and reward it when it does. **Mando Group** gives a percentage commission for recommendations that lead to new work. **Viral Marketing**, used extremely effectively by Hotmail to advertise itself at the bottom of messages as emails zoom around the Internet is also used by **Online Originals** as their e-books are sent between friends sharing works of literature.

By adopting an attitude to customers as partners rather than passive targets, interactive forms of marketing come to mind. For example websites that people can engage with (not just read) and printed materials that invite a response all treat customers as active participants.

Rather than thinking of expensive and relatively untargeted mass marketing (which in any case would be inappropriate for most creative businesses) turn this approach on its head and decide which single customer would be perfect if you could only have one. Then track down this ideal customer, then find one more, then another and so on.

In conclusion, marketing is not a magic dust that can make anything sell. The magic of marketing works when you put customers at the centre and build your enterprise around their needs.

This is an excerpt from the book 'T-Shirts and Suits:
A Guide to the Business of Creativity'



ISBN 0-9538254-2-6

The website associated with this book provides additional information, new material and further case studies, details of training and consultancy projects, a framework for a business plan, a glossary of terms and links to other useful websites.

www.t-shirtsandsuits.com

First published in 2005 by Merseyside ACME,
303 The Vanilla Factory, Fleet Street, Liverpool L1 4AR.
www.merseysideacme.com

Copyright © David Parrish 2005

The right of David Parrish to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the copyright owner except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London, England. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher. Warning: The doing of an unauthorised act in relation to a copyright work may result in both a civil claim for damages and criminal prosecution.

Disclaimer. Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this book at the date of publication, readers are advised to check that the information supplied has not changed since going to press. The information contained in this book is of a general nature and the author and publisher cannot accept liability for its use in conjunction with a commercial or other decision nor for errors or omissions. The information contained herein does not constitute professional advice. Readers are advised to consult their own professional advisor.

The examples in this publication are included purely as illustrations.

No endorsement or criticism of any organisation or individual is intended or should be inferred.

The views expressed in this publication are the author's own and may not necessarily reflect those of Merseyside ACME.

Designed in Liverpool by Mike Carney – www.mikesstudio.co.uk

T-Shirts and Suits™ is a trade mark of David Parrish.

Merseyside
acme
DEVELOPING CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

