

TOM

Clarity: Marketing's New Task

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Two score and a few years ago, my late grandfather ventured from his small farmhouse in Colfax, Louisiana to my family's home just south of Boston. Talk about culture shock. During his visit he glanced out of a sliding glass door and was blown away by the number of squirrels milling about in our backyard. Dozens of scavenging squirrels in plain sight and within arms reach. His eyes were bugging out of his head.

I didn't appreciate his amazement until I walked with him, a few years later, through the dense backwoods of his rustic home. You see, for as long as I can remember, my Paw Paw had farmed and hunted for most of his food. And Louisiana squirrel made one heck of a tasty gumbo. But as evolution would have it, the squirrels eventually figured this out as well. And so, as we walked quietly through the woodland—an area teeming with squirrels of every size and color—we never saw a single one. As Leda Cosmides and John Tooby explain in *Better than Rational: Evolutionary Psychology and the Invisible Hand*, “form follows function: the properties of an evolved mechanism reflect the structure of the task it evolved to solve.”

Believe it or not, this got me to thinkin' about the evolution of marketing (or lack thereof). What is the structure of today's marketing task? Yesterday's marketplace was somewhat like my childhood backyard: people were scavenging around, consuming everything in sight. They were easy to find and easy to reach. The marketer's task was simply to make people “aware” of their new and improved offering. And they did just that, primarily through mega spending on mass media advertising. But the marketplace has evolved. And it appears that it has changed *faster* than most marketing executives have changed.

Today's marketplace is more like my Paw Paw's woods. The customers are still there, and in the same numbers, but they have evolved to tune out, and otherwise hide from, marketers. And yet marketers have not evolved with them. While the marketplace pendulum has swung from a fascination with image and consumption to a preoccupation with experience and value, marketers continue to focus on awareness, engagement, and other extinct concepts. But awareness is not the nature of the task today. And, despite the ramblings of the ANA, neither is engagement.

The marketer's *new* task is one of clarity: "How do we make it clear to our audience that we're in business to help them (and not to hunt them)? How can we get a clearer view and understanding of our audience, so that we can design a business that best meets their desires? How can we provide them with a clear view and understanding of the value of our offering? How can we make it clear to our people that their activities define our brand?"

Clarity should be the guiding principle behind every marketing effort. Clearness of thought. Clearness of appearance. Clearness of message. Clarity should inform every campaign, drive every question, and rationalize every dollar spent and every piece of data captured and analyzed. Whether you're launching a large scale branding effort, producing an event, or simply crafting an email message, follow these two steps to marketing clarity:

1. **Discover.** Ask yourself; are we *truly* clear about how to create superior value such that customers are continuously attracted to us? And by value, I mean the qualities that render your product or service highly desirable by your audience. It may be performance value, financial value, time value, entertainment value, identity value, or some combination. Note: Market research rarely reveals new insights into value creation.
2. **Execute.** Now that you understand how to create superior value, you must clearly and precisely align all spending and activities to both communicate and deliver *that* value. Note: If you can't find the *value* in an activity, it does not exist.

That's it. Until marketers understand and embrace the concept of clarity, we'll continue to witness millions wasted on new logos, goofy ads, viral campaigns, reality TV, blogs, stadium naming, et al. And CMO's will continue to lose their jobs (as they should), on average, every 22 months. Open your eyes marketers! Your marketing plans are a smorgasbord of expensive and misguided tactics that collectively fail to add up to a clear and compelling brand—a reason to choose. We can see it. Why can't you?

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Tom Asacker writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for marketplace success in chaotic times. He is a brand adviser and author of critically acclaimed books including his latest, *A Clear Eye for Branding*, published by Paramount Market Publishing, New York. Visit acleareye.com to learn more.