

Intuitive Marketing

by Will Phillips

The first job of marketing—as distinct from promotion—is to understand the market. At the core of the marketing process lie questions such as how big is it? Is it growing? What are the basic needs? What are the shifting dynamics? With the answers to these questions, it becomes possible to promote effectively.

Well publicized tools such as surveys and focus groups are frequently employed to discover a particular market's needs. While valuable, these tools have shortcomings. They tend to take a straightforward, administrative approach and discourage opportunities for creative, or intuitive, marketing to occur. To a large extent, databased market research (i.e. surveys and focus groups) has replaced intuitive marketing because databased market research is always available, either in-house or for hire. It rings of "real" research with tools, techniques and statistical analysis. Intuitive market research is harder to come by coming as it does from a rare commodity—an entrepreneurial mind. And it never looks as reliable as a graphics-heavy survey report.

Databased market research reveals what the public prefers among alternatives we conceive. If we don't ask the right questions or offer the right opportunities, we never get the right answers. Intuitive marketing may provide better insight.

One famous example of market research asked people whether they thought a Stradivarius violin was worth a million dollars apiece. The response? *Yes!* Next question: *Would you like to have one?* *Yes!* Final question: *Would you buy one?* *No!*

Recently, travelers to tropical resorts were told that tourist impact often degraded the environment in the long run. When asked if tourists planning to travel to such areas would be concerned, the answer was universally, *Yes*. When asked if people traveling to such an area should be assessed a small fee to help address some of these environmental issues, eighty percent replied, *Yes*. When they went on their next trip, they were asked if they would voluntarily contribute one dollar. Nearly eighty percent said: *No*.

Both these examples underscore that if you don't ask enough of the right questions, you'll be misled. It's a little like the sales person asking if you want the latest gizmo in red or blue—a sales closing technique—when you're not sure you want it at all. When you say, blue (the color most people prefer over red) the salesman thinks he's understanding the market better.

Another biasing effect from surveys and focus groups, is that everybody knows that there are the "right" answers. When asked face-to-face their preferences, people pick the "right" answer. Interestingly enough, they will even do this in anonymous responses. When asked, *Do you value museums?* People unconsciously think: *Oh yes, of course, museums are a good thing. So, me being a good person and a good citizen, I would like them.* The questions may not probe enough to get information to help you really understand your market.

Finally, database market research costs preclude frequently analysis.

Why Worry?

Irene Hirano, President of the Japanese American National Museum, in addressing the California Association of Museums in July, 2000 remarked on a slight decrease in philanthropy for museums in recent years, at the same time the stock market was booming. The number of millionaires increased daily and other types of nonprofits received dramatic funding increases. To me this says that the museum world continues to appeal to its supporters but not beyond that small segment of already committed supporters.

The AAM, individual museums, and regional museum associations make gallant efforts to get the story out, so non-museum going citizens and politicians more deeply appreciate museums. This may be a valuable, but not sufficient, approach. When trying to attract market segments not naturally aligned, it is critical to understand what they might need, rather than telling more about what you can deliver.

The Chicago Ice Company delivered ice to homes. It replaced horse and carts with delivery trucks as a response to refrigeration, missing the point. People wanted cooling, not ice.

Data based marketing fumbles, because of blinders about people. Intuitive marketing, on the other hand, looks at the human condition. Good entrepreneurs have been intuiting forever—they see opportunity and fill it.

Lee Iacoca played this role in the design of the Mustang. The Mustang came from Iacoca's intuition about what the American male wanted in his car. Market research created the Edsel, a complete failure. Iacoca also championed the minivan, not a design created from market research. By asking customers questions about what they need in a car, two doors or four, cloth or leather, or colors, you could get a blindered view. No one spontaneously said: *I want a car with two front doors and a big sliding barn door so I can load my kids and packages easily.*

Iacoca simply opened his eyes while standing in a pre-minivan shopping center and noticed the difficulty a family had trying to put groceries, two kids, car seats, portable cribs, and diapers into a normal sedan, or even a station wagon.

More recently, Chrysler created the PT Cruiser—a standard small car, sheathed in a retro body style, conceived without extensive market research, but by intuition. When people see the PT Cruiser, some instantaneously say, *I have to have one.* In the Cruiser's first year, there has been a waiting list and they sell above the sticker price. The design immediately connects with part of the market.

Intuitive market research looks at the market's needs with empathy and rejects preconceived notions. It bridges the divide between seller and customer, emotionally. Insights may be based on very little actual data. How can this be reliable? It's easy, if you look.

Methods Change, Needs Remain the Same:

We're bombarded with a huge array of new products, all promoted, packaged, positioned, and priced in different ways, and delivered via clicks, bricks, and mail order. In other words, marketing and the product delivered continually changes. In stark contrast, the basic needs all products and services meet have not changed for thousands of years. In order to fulfill the basic human need for food, we initially marketed commodities like produce fresh from the field. Later, we marketed the added value of the wonders of canned and then frozen food. Today, we market the service of meals via wheels, gourmet at home or drive thru, ordered on the phone or over the Internet. And, moreover, the sustenance may carry with it the trappings of a special experience—flowers and wine delivered by a driver in a tuxedo. Insightful observers of the human condition describe these needs in the prose and poetry, music and mime of the fundamental human condition.

Intuitive Marketing Examples:

Who Am I?

Nearly three-quarters of a million people visit the Mormon Genealogy Library in Salt Lake City every year. The library does little to attract these visitors. So what's going on? People flock to the Mormon Genealogical Library to discover their roots.

My father grew up in Cairo, Illinois. About four years ago when I was near Cairo, I stopped to visit the town hall. I went to the registry room where all the town records are kept, about twenty feet square. Eight other couples crammed the room, all researching their ancestors. Despite dusty, ill-lit working conditions, people came from all over the United States to this registry of information. This happens in town halls everywhere. And no one spends a dime on promotion.

Adopted children seeking birth parents constitute another example of looking for roots. Children passionately pursue this research and we respond with empathy when we hear of it. Our hearts reach out. We immediately understand.

Thus, it seems people fundamentally desire to know their family, where they came from, how they connect. In graduate school, we call this history. In life, we call it finding out who I am, learning about my family.

The Presence of The Past reports that professional historians and the general public have very different views on history. As long as we operate from a professional stand, without the insights intuitive marketing can bring, we will never have the broad appeal and support that many museums seek.

Wild Things

By and large museums have had overwhelming public response when they exhibit wolves, bears, and dinosaurs. Why?

In pursuing this question in one museum, two explanations emerged. First, animal magnetism. When you see a brown bear half again as tall as you, in the wild, there is an amazing desire to understand, to know the creature. I don't know how this can be explained except the extraordinary animal power creates some kind of magnetism. The drive of the big game hunter? The source of cave bear religions?

Secondly, museums and the zoos provide a way of facing dangerous wild creatures, safety. Because of the danger, most of us can't approach a beast in the wild. Exhibitions enables us to confront our fear in a safe manner.

Entranced

A number of small art museums host Dale Chihuly glass exhibitions. In most cases, the museums report that this one temporary exhibition generated more attendance alone than in the previous two years. The museums reported some extraordinary attracting power of the medium, rather than excellent marketing. Visitors came and told others. Word of mouth built high attendance.

So, what's going on? Here are a few thoughts from museum directors about Chihuly glass.

Wow! Stunned! Many people had never seen anything like it. It was new, previously unknown, unimagined.

Entranced! A level of fantasy and engagement.

What does it mean? This question rarely arose. Many objects had an obvious use, such as a vase, a plate, or an ashtray but, more than that, the issue of purpose simply did not seem to be relevant.

Play:

Forbes reports *a family with a Geo Safari, a sort of pipsqueak laptop that uses flashing lights and a synthesized voice to play a quiz game sits ignored in the giveaway bin... a deck of cards is real hot in our house. An even bigger hit is dad's 25 year old game of Battleship... [the] boys played the board game for eight hours straight. Monopoly, Candy Land, and Clue all have strong, continued popularity.*

Kids want play, not technology. The two toys with the highest selling units are Mattel's thirty-two-year-old line of eighty-five cents Hot Wheel cars and Crayola's 24 pack. Failure to understand this led Mattel under Jill Barad's leadership to invest heavily in technology only to have sales bomb—a forty-two percent drop, first quarter 2000. Paul Allen, Microsoft co-founder, also invested in a high technology

game for kids only to see it fall flat. Most kids lose interest in the technology quickly.

The intuitive marketing insight: kids like to play, socially. They like to engage one another. Careful observation on a playground or in a home will help you articulate this deep human need. Museums must be careful of overspending on technology for technology's sake and losing sight of the child's need—to play.

Follow up and Action:

These examples give an idea of what intuitive marketing is about. Other areas to explore and define might be:

- Birth
- Love
- Relationships
- Family
- Death
- Bravery
- Comfort

Spend time with your colleagues, thinking, reading the world's great literature, creating a list of basic human motivations which your organization has the power to enhance. If this kind of intuitive marketing doesn't balance database marketing, your museum is in danger of yet another Impressionist art exhibit, eventually jading the public's sensibility. By beginning with a deep understanding of basic human needs we can respond with our own criteria to stimulate our creativity, and evaluate our choice of buildings, programs, and exhibitions.

Intuitive marketing can supplement the data based surveys and focus groups. In fact, it can often shape the focus of data based research.