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Dick Maggiore: Marketing 'laws' point path to success

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Last installment in four-part series shows that ideas from nearly 25 years ago still elevate brands above their competition.

By Dick Maggiore Special to The Canton Repository

(Editor's note: This is the final installment of a series on positioning pioneers Jack Trout's and Al Ries' enduring book, "The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing.")

In art and in science, basic tenets serve as the foundation of "laws" that guide actions that help us navigate to the outcomes we desire. Laws also serve marketers, as we have discussed the past three weeks, and those who understand how to apply them win the wars for sales and market share.

Today we conclude our analysis of the laws that advertising and marketing gurus Jack Trout and Al Ries first defined in their important book, "The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing." They are pretty much as immutable today as they were when Trout and Ries wrote their book nearly 25 years ago, still informing marketing strategies that elevate brands above their competition.

No. 17: The Law of Unpredictability

It's hard to predict the future, let alone what your competitors are planning.

Consider that those who make predictions about the future are almost always wrong. Something always intervenes to change the picture. With the rise in technological innovation, no company, product or service is immune from change.

Even a good dose of research might not alleviate risk. Xerox conducted research before introducing the plain-paper copier. The research concluded that no one would pay 5 cents for a plain-paper copy. Xerox ignored the research, and its brand became synonymous with the photocopying machine. The rest is history.

Research is good at telling us about the past, but not as good at predicting the future.

Charles Darwin told us species' fittest members survived to reproduce and lead their kind's evolution. The fittest were thought to be the strongest. But actually, the fittest were not necessarily the strongest, but rather the ones most able to adapt.

So it is with companies, products and services. To cope with change, we need to be willing and able to react and change quickly.

No. 18: The Law of Success

Success breeds arrogance, and arrogance can lead to failure, says technology and entrepreneurship speaker Christian Renaud. We strive for objectivity, but the ego loves subjectivity. Good marketing strives for objectivity.

This might explain why so many brands insist on using their brand name on line extensions that don't fit with their brand. Instead, they need a new brand name for the line extension.

They think it is their brand name that made them successful. That's not the case. The brand became successful because it chose the right positioning idea and made other smart marketing moves. They focused on an attribute. They got into minds first with that idea.

The almighty Google has a graveyard full of line-extended failures: Google Glass, Google Wave, Google Answers, Google Video, Google Notebook, Google Catalog Search, Google Buzz, Google Page Creator and more.

But Google also has some huge winners: YouTube, Android, Adwords, Chrome and more. Notice the winners' names. They all have new brand names.

No. 19: The Law of Failure

We in advertising speak about rolling around in the mud of the marketplace. It means studying trends, understanding customers' needs and knowing the competition. It's all important, but even after you roll around in the mud of the marketplace, you might fail.

Starting a company or launching a new brand involves considerable risk. You can do everything right and still fail.

Persistence can be a virtue, but the law of failure holds that if it's not going to work, cut your losses. Admit the failure fast and move on. According to Bloomberg, eight out of 10 entrepreneurs who start businesses fail within the first 18 months.

No. 20: The Law of Hype

New Coke was the ultimate hyped product launch, receiving around $1 billion worth of free publicity and a few hundred million dollars of paid advertising. But the product fizzled with consumers and in less than two months, it was pulled.

Often, when you need the hype, it usually means you're in trouble. When things are going well, we don't need the hype.

In 2001, hype began to build around a new device code-named "Ginger" that Steve Jobs said could become bigger than the personal computer. It finally was unveiled as a new way to transport individuals and would be called the Segway. By 2002, the Segway sputtered to a halt.

At the New York World's Fair in 1964, AT&T introduced and hyped the Picturephone. Interestingly, today, we have FaceTime and Skype, but we prefer texting instead.

Fifty years of hype and we chose to type.

No. 21: The Law of Acceleration

Fads come and go. They can be gone in a blink of an eye, like waves on the ocean. Trends, on the other hand, are like the tide. Trends are long term.

Successful brands are built on trends, not fads.

Fads accelerate and then fade. Trends can be almost invisible with a much slower acceleration. Over time, they will become large and long lasting.

It's important to discern whether your product is a fad or a trend. The most profitable thing to ride is a long-term trend.

No. 22: The Law of Resources

Authors Trout and Ries might have saved the most important law for the last. It's not enough to have the right idea. It's not enough to be first with the idea. It is imperative to be first to get your idea into the mind of your customer.

Folks who come up with that great idea often think they just need some good marketing help. That's not enough, either. It takes money to get into the mind and stay there.

Ideas without money won't get very far. If it's a good idea, the idea should be used to get the money. Then the appropriate marketing program can be executed.

Gablinger was the first light beer, but it didn't have the money to get into the consumer's mind. Miller did. Miller Lite won.

So we see it takes all three: a good idea + money + a good marketing program = a win in the marketplace.

Epilogue

The authors deserve our appreciation for formulating and sharing what have proved to be the immutable laws of marketing.

Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of Innis Maggiore, founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.