

An Inside Story

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Foreword

This article is about life, and yes, it's about marketing too. Marketing is one of my passions and to define what it really is, is a task I have always wanted to do. This article portrays the significance of marketing in our lives and tries to define marketing and our lives in a simplified manner. This is my own interpretation of marketing so please bear with me.

The processes involved in marketing may be more complex and intricate than what has been defined here but at the end of the day this is what marketing is all about. Read on...

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Living in a complex world, man tries to find simple answers to rather complex questions, situations and problems. Most of these intricacies are man-made. As ironical as it may sound, these complex problems can have simple solutions. This paper attempts to unravel some complexities involved in business systems in general, and marketing in particular. It should not be taken as an immaculately binding testimonial, but rather, a beginning to the development of a whole new system of processes based on simple, but technically sound designs.

Marketing Unveils

Many a times we come across people who wish to know more about Marketing. Has there been a time when somebody asked you to define Marketing? To marketers, this is one of the most commonly addressed questions. How would you define Marketing? I can give you numerous definitions taken from various books and journals. Some of them may look pertinent, while others may not. Some definitions are too difficult while others are just too lengthy. Considering the vast horizon of marketing, it may seem difficult to produce a concise and complete definition of this subject. At times, Marketing becomes more or less obscure and abstract. Things become gloomy and marketing, all the more mysterious. Just to clear things up, we need to develop a simple, concise and yet complete interpretation of marketing. If you ask me to give you a one-word definition of marketing I would say, "Relationships!" Marketing is all about relationships. Developing, Managing and Sustaining Relationships, nothing more and nothing less!

Dozens of books have been written on Customer Care, Product Positioning, Brand Development, Market Analysis, Segmentation and Consumer Behavior etc. all of them have their own ways of dealing with such matters and I have my

own. Marketing and all its associated processes revolve around “Relationships”. Pure and simple, relationships! Simple isn't it! Well, not quite. The difficult part comes in when you have to understand, manage and maintain these relationships. This is where, the real test starts.

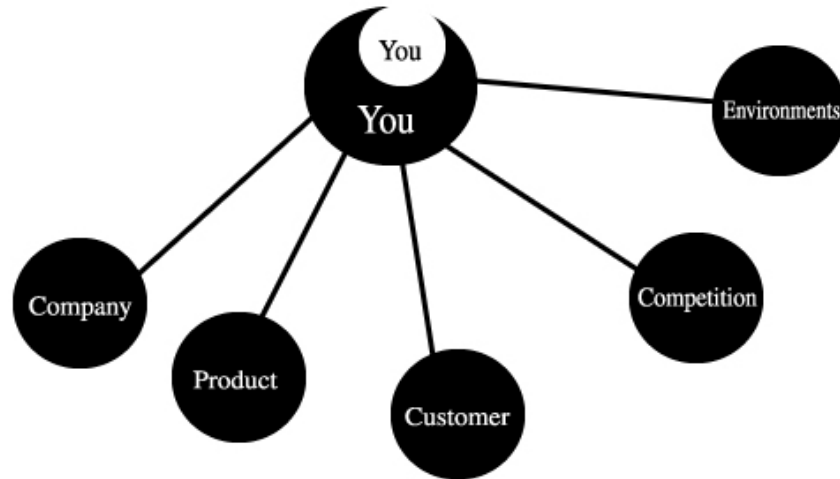
Now let's get into the nitty-gritty of marketing. Think of anything and everything that comes to your mind when you are thinking of marketing and think of it, in terms of ‘Relationships’. Strategic market planning; target marketing, customer needs, wants and demands; market research; consumer roles and behavior analysis, product design and management; product pricing, placement and promotion, personal selling and sales management; competitor analysis, brand management and presentation, mark all activities and processes as relationships between you and the opposite entity, for example, you and your customer, you and your product and so on.

The relationship cycle starts with you. At first, you need to develop a strong bonding within yourself. This would be the beginning of your growth and development. It will take you in the right direction and all other relationships/ processes would start from this point onwards. Your relationship with your company or business (since companies are living and breathing entities with prestige, image, needs and wants), your peers, your products and your relationship with your customers, how well you understand them and how well you keep pace with their needs, your relationship with your surroundings or environments and how well you respond to them.

You + You, You + Company (You + Employee including all sales force, upper and lower level management, IT personnel, distribution channels, production and purchase department etc.) You + Corporate goals (This is where company focused loyal relationships are formed since you are a part of the company, and the company is an integral part of you), You + Product, You + Customer, You + Competition, You + Environments (this may include; changing life styles,

technological advancements, social adaptations, global policy shifts etc.) are all basic relationships and every other process or activity no matter how complex or intricate, starts from relationships like these. These relationships form the foundation of all activities. Most of them are interlinked and can have overlapping concurrences so develop a strong base and you have secured a strong building. A building full of activities, processes, and relationships!

You see, Marketing has more to do with people than with ordinary, lifeless things and where human element is present, relationships emerge automatically. Take a look at all the above entities; You, Customer, Competitor, Product (in relation to its producer and consumer) and finally, the Company (in terms of its employees, need, identity) are all human-enriched possibilities possessing endless opportunities of developing everlasting relationships.



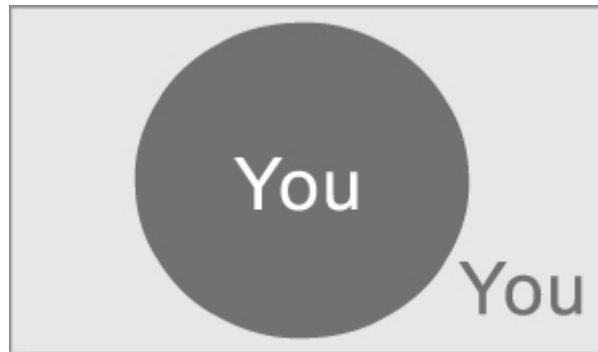
Basic Relationships (Establishing The Foundation)

Relationship Basics

It's about time to get acquainted with "relationships". Merely, declaring marketing equivalent to relationships is not enough. To clear things up we need a little more elaboration. Marketing is a continuous process of developing, managing and sustaining relationships. Even after one has managed to develop a strong relationship, holding on to it becomes all the more challenging. You, the company, the product, the customer, distribution, environments, competition and human resource are all distinct entities with distinguished relationships. Each relationship is unique and needs to be handled accordingly. Nobody can tell you how to develop a relationship, or let alone, manage one, but people can always give you a few pointers or commonalities, which can guide you in shaping such lasting relationships. Devotion, caring and honesty are just a few to start with.

Firstly, you need to do a little convincing. You have to convince yourself whether you wish to establish a relationship or not. This is where "you - yourself" relationship plays its role. When you establish a relationship with yourself you immediately know who you are? What you are? Where you should be? What you need to be doing? It answers all the mysteries about you as you are the control center of all such relationships. It makes you aware of your characteristics, your strengths and weaknesses etc.

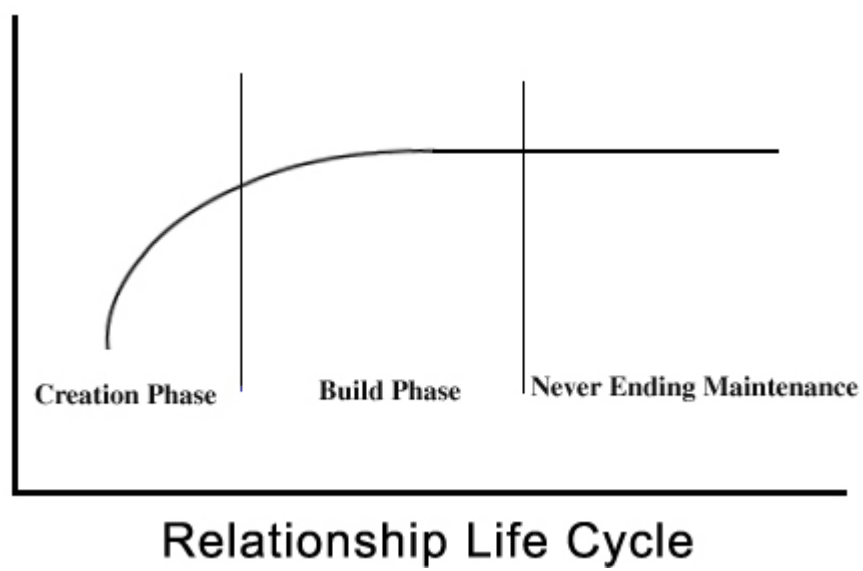
What happens is that, when you decide that you need to develop a relationship you try to know each and everything about the other person or entity and this is the best part of making relationships whereby continuous exchange of information takes place.



You being a subset of you (You - You relationship)

After you have established a 'You and You' relationship you are ready to institute other entities into your relationship circle like your company, product and customer. All such relationships would then be based upon sound foundations of selfless development.

Working with Relationships



The relationship life cycle consists of three distinct phases, the Creation Phase, the Building Phase & the Maintenance Phase. The Creation phase may require a 180% commitment from your part (the extra 80% is for the opposite entity or partner whom you have decided to form a relationship with, since there may be times when you need to do his share of participation as well) but as the cycle progresses things start succeeding naturally. The above diagram depicts an ideal relationship approach. There may, however, be some ups and downs along the way but at the end you need to maintain a certain level of relationship with your partnering entity and this is what the straight line demonstrates. Mind you, your commitment should not die out or you'll have to start all over again.

Once built, relationships define a never-ending process, where things keep on changing and you keep on adapting accordingly. Let's consider the 'You -You' scenario. Here, you start off by knowing more about yourself and with a continuous dialogue you gradually build a rapport with yourself. With the passage of time people tend to change and only by maintaining a continuous rapport within yourself you can change your plans and actions accordingly.

Similar situation occurs with other relationships. In a 'You - Environment' setup, external forces and agents (Macro & Micro factors) change quickly, thus requiring continuous adaptation from your side. That is why, sustaining relationships, is so important. Whereas in a 'You - Product' relationship you begin by understanding your product's features, build your relationship by digging deep and identifying its benefits, strengths and weaknesses. Ask who, what and why type questions. They may sound ridiculous at first, but they would definitely help you form the beginning of a relationship between you and your product. You see, when you ask your product, who you are, then you go ahead and read about the product background thereby taking the first step in forming a relationship with your product.

Maintain your relationship with your product and you would be entering the realms of product improvement and enhancement. This is when your creativity is performing at its peak and you start adding value to your product. At this point you should have established a relationship with your company (You - Company) your customers (You - Customer) and your environment (You - Environment) the combination of all such relationships along with the You - Product relationship would give you a winning combination where relationships are interweaved to produce synergetic marketing.

Customer relationships need special caring as well. Getting a customer is easy but keeping him isn't. You can only achieve this by maintaining strong deep-rooted relationships with your customers. Customers' demand personalized long-term relationships and if your relationship ceases to mature then you are likely to loose your client.

Relationships pass through a definite life cycle. As the number of relationships grow, maintaining them become all the more cumbersome. When working with relationships one must always remember that he has promises to make and relationships to keep. So make a promise, start a relationship and keep it!

Relationships Everywhere

If you look around you, you will find clusters of relationship networks. These clusters are all linked together to complete our society and our life. Maintaining a harmonious equilibrium within this entire network of networks is quite important. When this equilibrium is disrupted, problem starts.

We adopt different professions and perform distinct roles during our lifetime. Now let's take a look at some of these professions in the light of our relationship theory. IT professionals develop relationships with computers; developers with

program codes, designers have a knack for graphics, colors and nature, while students develop a relationship with books. This reminds me of my childhood story. I was in 9th class and my final exams were near. I had to pass a Sindhi language course which came as a compulsory subject if you are studying in Karachi. I was finding it difficult to come to terms with this language and in my anxiety I squashed my Sindhi book gave it a few twists and threw it in disgust. After a while I realized that if I need to pass, I better make friends with this book. So, I picked up my Sindhi book and started my first ever relationship with a book. Eventually, I passed! From then onwards I have managed to continue my friendship with books and the relationship has paid off.

Developing relationships is a natural trait and can only come with experience. What I can suggest here is that, whenever you are thinking of something, think of it in terms of relationships. This world is all about relationships, making, breaking and strengthening relationships. We have a relationship with God (Allah), with our parents, friends, relatives and every other thing that affects our lives. A mathematician's relationship with numbers, chemist's with compounds, a scientist's relationship with science and so on. Relationships have always played a role in our lives. Their initiation takes courage; their development requires perseverance; and their maintenance demands patience. In order to utilize the full potential of relationships, one must always remember the golden rule, "initiate, build and keep them for life!"