



RESPECT YOUR CONSUMER

MARKETERS HAVE A bad habit of talking about “the consumer” as if they are one person. Consumers are in fact all different—they are a lot like people in that respect—and they are in fact us. We all resent being patronized, but many marketers do this with astonishing regularity. People discount advertising statements (in fact in most cases they don’t even read them) and most of us can spot bullshit pretty well. We are all consumers—if we can see through marketers and their cunning ploys, so can everybody else.

The difficulty is always to encapsulate the concept of customer respect in a way that staff can relate to when they are working with people. It’s easy for our staff to get into the habit of seeing our customers as simply cannon fodder, or walking wallets, rather than as human beings with their own needs, wants, and skills. If you need an example, try dealing with the care workers of a friend who is a wheelchair user—or better still, use a chair yourself for a day and see how people treat you.

The idea

David Ogilvy was one of the giants of the advertising industry. He was responsible for telling us that the only sound in a Rolls-Royce at 60 mph is the sound of the clock ticking, for example. What he told his staff was equally important—among many Ogilvy-isms, two stand out. The first is: “The consumer is not a moron—she’s your wife!” We have to keep reminding ourselves that our consumers are not stupid, they are people just like us.

The second one is “People do not buy from bad-mannered liars.” Yet so many marketing communications (especially telephone marketing approaches) are both bad-mannered and untrue. Somebody calling from India, claiming to be called Sharon, and immediately asking about how much one has left on one’s mortgage, is clearly bad-mannered and lying.

These two statements should be up in letters of fire in every marketing department in the country.

In practice

- Remember that your staff may not have the same commitment to the business that you have.
- People often forget that consumers are people too—there is nothing wrong with reminding them.
- Putting up signs to remind people has a long history—IBM’s “Think!” signs, Bill Clinton’s “It’s the economy, stupid!” sign, and many others have worked well.
- Don’t forget the lesson yourself, especially when dealing with somebody difficult!