

## Business People Are People Too

Now that the New Economy hype is in the past, many of us are rethinking how new the New Economy really is. Perhaps we're entering a time of hybrid economy where old economy businesses evolve using New Economy tools, and New Economy businesses ground themselves in old economy fundamentals.

It turns out that the winners have not been the New Economy zealots, but those who were open to ideas from any source, new or old—and not just their own. And if we're going to be open-minded, we need to ignore the conventional wisdom and learn from each other. A good place to start is by examining the artificial distinction between business and consumer.

Approaching these two sectors as if they were as different as communism and capitalism is one of marketing's longest-standing mistakes. Conventional wisdom had it that consumer choices were primarily emotional, that the best way to reach the consumer was to produce advertising based on the emotional appeal of a brand. Business decision making, on the other hand, was assumed to be rational—ads with lots of facts was the way to go.

The terms used reveal the prejudice behind these labels—consumers make “choices” (an arbitrary, spontaneous process) while business people make “decisions” (a careful, considered process).

Let's stop for a second and consider two points more basic than the conventional wisdom: consumers do think, and business people have feelings!

If you don't believe us, consider the last time you scanned the nutritional content on a frozen meal, checked out the performance specs for a new laptop, read a review of a video before renting ... you were a consumer, and you were thinking, right? Now consider a typical business day when you were annoyed by intrusive calls, angry at poor service, excited by a new idea, proud of program results. Yes, we all have feelings at work, and they affect our decisions—when a new product or partner feels right, we say we trust them, we like the way they think, the chemistry is right, they have the right attitude.

Okay, you're guilty, like the rest of us, of taking things for granted. It's to be expected—we can't challenge everything, and maybe the roots of this distinction lie in what we were taught (pre-liberation)—you know, the old social stereotypes of women as emotional and men as rational? They easily translated in marketing to: consumers (usually women) are emotional, and business decision makers (usually men) are rational.

This is, of course, ridiculous. Men are consumers, not just of cars and lawn mowers and stereos, but of baby food and furniture. Women are both homemakers and captains of industry. And both sexes are, and always have been, a blend of rational and emotional.

If you're starting to think that, yes, these distinctions between consumer and business are artificial and false—here's one more: We assume that people compartmentalize their lives, that business is 9 to 5 and consumer is everything else. But, of course, that's nonsense. People wake up thinking about work, try out new ideas in the shower, fret over business decisions at dinner, make personal calls on company time, run errands at work, do “research” on the Internet in their offices.

And then there's media melding—business ads on early morning television and golf tournaments, on drive-time radio, in newspapers and outdoor. The reverse is true on the consumer side—scotch and watch and travel ads in business books.

And, of course, the Internet—that electronic window on the world for the cubicle set, where vendor research can, with a click or two, become an intense search for next season's vacation package.

You ask, if this blending is true, what do we, as marketers do? What's the shared learning?

On the consumer side, we might take a page from business marketing—bring a little thought back into consumer advertising and the customer may come to believe we respect her intelligence. Because with so many ads appealing to the emotional side, and with so few emotions to address, we in marketing have created a kind of emotional commoditization where ads all feel alike.

On the business side, we can bring some feelings into advertising—speak to the emotional end benefit of the target. This might finally put an end to ads with generic smiling heads in suits and over-Macintoshed, catalog-style layouts. And then, perhaps, we can also retire meaningless and stifling descriptors like the New Economy.



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