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Sales Collateral Isn't by Bob Manna & Matt Manna • 1776977C(R04)

"Efforts to increase awareness are the same as hunting with blanks. There's plenty of noise, but when the noise fades, nothing much will have been accomplished."

Is it possible for an individual to purchase a product, cast a vote, or contribute to charity, before making the conscious decision (however impromptu it may be) to do so? The obvious answer is no; a reality that reveals the inherent flaw personified by the term, sales collateral.

As a phrase, sales collateral is understood to mean media and activities such as print literature, radio & television advertising, eMail campaigns, mobile & desktop internet promotions, trade show appearances & exhibits, robocalls, search engine optimization, etc.

The ubiquitous use of sales collateral is fostered by the belief that sales collateral increases awareness, which in turn leads to improved sales, more votes, greater charitable contributions, etc.

We'll address "collateral" a little later in this article. For now lets address the belief that increasing awareness leads to improved sales, more votes, greater contributions, etc. Is the fact that awareness precedes the decision to act, evidence that awareness induced the decision to act? If that question comes across as enigmatic, consider the following.

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Universally known company A is successful. Company B is less successful than A. Therefore B increases its sales collateral, expecting that increased awareness will lead to increased sales. That logic seems sound as far as it goes, which isn't very far. By example: All living things need water. A tulip needs water. Therefore a tulip is a living thing. But what happens when you substitute "tulip" with "swimming pool?"

Obviously, the conclusion that all living things need water does not mean that water can make everything into a living thing. The same is true with awareness, and it doesn't take products anywhere near as disparate as tulips and swimming pools to prove it.

Most people enjoy eating ketchup. Most people who eat ketchup buy Heinz. Hunts also makes ketchup. Therefore if Hunts increased its awareness to the same level as Heinz, Hunts would sell as much ketchup as Heinz. Ridiculous! How long would Hunts delay in increasing awareness if increasing awareness worked? Also, if increasing awareness worked, and Hunts didn't do it, Del Monte sure would.

Ask any life-long Chevy owner to name five other car makers and he or she will be able to do so easily and instantly — that's awareness! The pivotal question is, why, being equally aware of Ford, Toyota, Honda, BMW, Chrysler, Jaguar, KIA, etc., does the die hard Chevy owner repeatedly choose Chevy? It's because being made aware and being persuaded are no more closely related as, oh let's say, the sport of lawn bowling and the sport of mixed martial arts.

It's true that lawn bowling and mixed martial arts can both be classified as a sport, but there is absolutely no further similarity between the two.

The problem with words like "awareness" and "sport" is that they are proxies — words that by way of approximation loosely represent disparate things. Often the approximation is so loose that the proxy utterly fails to represent the issue(s) at hand.

Awareness does not cause people to buy, vote, or contribute, persuasion does. A promotional effort designed to increase awareness is the same as going hunting with blanks. There will be plenty of noise and others will know you're around. But when the noise fades, nothing much will have been accomplished.

As for collateral; the pure definition of collateral is, “secondary, additional but subordinate.” That definition forces a second pivotal question. If the decision to act always proceeds the act, then in what sense can sales collateral be seen as secondary, additional, or subordinate?

The truth is that sales collateral is not secondary or additional, and it is certainly not subordinate. It’s the other way round. Successful products, candidates, causes, etc., are subordinate to sales collateral. Further, the talent to recognize the proper role of sales collateral, and to properly create it, requires greater skill and effort than that required to develop the actual product, candidate, cause, etc. How could it be otherwise?

It is only by connecting persuasively that sales collateral can motivate a sale, a vote, or a contribution. The connection is primary, for it is only after (and if) a connection is made that a product, candidate, or cause will get a chance to deliver on the connection.

As long as the belief persists that awareness is the same as persuasiveness, sales collateral will continue to be casually prepared and indifferently distributed. And the quantity of noise and spam will continue to grow, as will the quantity (and size) of trash containers in offices, in convention centers, and on trade show floors.



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