

Message.
Subject: Marcom Newsletter
Sender: John MINCK / HP0400/02

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Part 1.

TO: Julia LEIGHTON / HP0000/53

Part 2.

Julia, you know me, always on some soapbox or other.

I wonder if you would consider this piece for one of your Marcom issues? I know it has a bit of controversy. If you think it needs some changes to qualify, let me know.

Or, if it gets a C-, I'll just go lick my wounds.

Part 3.

COACHING AND CHEERLEADING

Management at HP regularly calls for HP managers and employees to become more customer- and marketing-oriented. And sometimes, they may even come to be convinced that we are achieving that desirable goal.

I claim that it is much closer to the truth that HP is more than a little bit schizophrenic regarding customers. For example, one of the best places to meet customers in a non-threatening environment is in the various professional organizations of engineers, such as the IEEE, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. This is an international association of over 250,000 members with perhaps 40 professional societies.

But when it comes time to support the objective of meeting customers, does HP pay for membership to IEEE? Well, no. How many middle managers and even top managers belong to any of these professional societies? Well, not too many. Is this a "do-as-I-say" type of management? Probably.

It's true that for the important roles of new product strategies and marketing research, that we depend heavily for customer contact on our field sales force and divisional marketing engineers. And as a general rule, we're probably as good as most companies in identifying and consulting with customers. But of course, knowledge of customers and their measuring and computation problems needs to go a lot deeper than a few market researchers in the marketing department.

The lab design engineers can do a better job defining the new products when they have an intimate knowledge of the thought processes of customers in the real-life situation they face. Manufacturing engineers can relate better to the crucial need customers have for system reliability, if they can hear a customer tell how seriously down-time affects their image of HP.

So where does Marcom come in? I claim that Marcom people, every one of us, must assume the job of being the heart and soul of HP's concern about customers. In addition to all the regular process-oriented things we have to do to communicate the product technical things to customers, we have to assume the roles of Cheerleader and Coach.

Both roles grow out of our particular knowledge of our customers, who they are, how they think and why they buy. And it's more than just the simple knowledge of how to put on a trade show, buy the space, and arrange the inbound trucking. It's the knowledge of what motivates a customer to like HP and keep coming back year after year. The cheerleader plays on the emotions of the crowd and the team. They understand those emotions. They capitalize on them. And we Marcom folks can do the same, to leverage the considerable talents of our divisional teams to know and love those customers.

The old coach, on the other hand, is the soul of the marketing department. He or she, no matter how old or young they are with their organization, carries the HP customer culture on their sleeve. They just "know" how to deal with customer situations as naturally as driving a car without having to think about it.

The coach is the Marcom manager at a trade show who comes upon a group of HP factory and sales people all clustered in an impenetrable group, all catching up on past times, and breaks up the party by suggesting that there are customers coming along the aisle who need to be stopped and listened to, and sold.

The old coach is the one who joins customer professional organizations and brings along the new player to the monthly meetings to introduce him/her to real-life breathing customers. They might even shame a manager or two from marketing or the lab to come with them. Sure, some of the meeting agendas are turkeys, but that's the way things are in human events, some super, a lot good, and a lot bad.

Let me give one final example. Several years ago I attended a customer seminar in an HP field office. At the end of the day, at the wine and cheese get-together, customers were standing around the sides of the room quietly eating their hors-d'oeuvres and sipping their wine, while a number of HP factory engineers and field engineers were gathered in an animated group in the center. Now the wine and cheese was a very friendly way to finish the customer training, but we were being anything but friendly. It is what I call HP-swallowing, and it happens all the time.

But now, an HP Vice-President who happens in town comes into the room. Now the entire HP gang swarms to talk with the V-P. Well, that's certainly natural from a human point of view. I mean, how often do you get the ear of an HP VP in a casual setting? But of course, I claim that the DM is present, and certainly the VP should have taken the coaching role and prodded all the HP people to break it up and get out there with the real purpose of the day, those wonderful, shy customers.

And did the old coach Minck step up and make such a pronouncement to the HP group? I'd like to tell you I did, but even old outspoken John doesn't always feel like telling an HP VP what to do, even though I know him.

So here is my message. Take a leadership role in your division for customer concerns. Be the cheerleader if you can, or the coach if needed--and it usually is. Join just one customer organization. When you go to trade shows, don't talk with other Marcom folks from other companies. But instead, talk with your division's customers. You may not be able to stay up with the technical jargon, but you can get to know the customer's business situation and purchasing patterns and political situation.

And don't be discouraged by luke-warm reactions at first. We have to

be in this for the long haul. Persevere. Learn. Be creative. Be aggressive. There probably is no one else as truly customer-oriented as us.