

Implementing Operations Management in Marketing for Innovation and Sustainability

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Abstract

Gone are those days when departments used to work in silos. In today's era-- transparency, adaptation, continuous improvement (Kaizen), just in time are all, despite being terminologies used primarily in operations management, applicable to the field of marketing thereby leading to a sustainable marketing presence. In this work, I propose methods on which marketing can improve by using strategies common in operations management. These tactics include House of quality where customer's feedback can be used to improve the manner in which marketing is done. Quality assurance where transparency, ethics and negotiation become crucial pillars of high quality for marketing. Introduction of automation (Jidoka) to understand the emotional intelligence quotient when performing a market research thereby enabling the marketing team to create their portfolios in a more trust worthy and convincing manner. The paper will talk about the usage of Toyota production system in the field of marketing.

Keywords: *Operations management, Kaizen, Jidoka, quality, TPS*

Introduction

Manufacturing industries today primarily segregate themselves in terms of departments whether it is marketing, HR or finance. Marketing usually becomes the liaison between the manufacturing team and the customers, which many times causes a communication gap between those who make the product and those who purchase the product. While it is true that the skill sets involved in sales and marketing enables the team to work on the field to persuade customers to purchase the product and display the products in a promising manner, the ultimate solution to any problem is provided by the manufacturing team who thereby need transparency in the communication. This is not to say that the marketing team does not provide transparency. It is only to emphasize that the language of communication in terms of how engineers / scientists think and how sales and marketing people think differs which thereby brings a gap between the two. Therefore, by helping the marketing team understand the world of manufacturing, the methodologies incorporated in a manufacturing/production department will enable the marketing team to also bring in the same thought process in their ability to be a good liaison between the outside world of customers/clients and the inside world of the mechanics themselves. The Toyota production system is a very well-known framework in the manufacturing society. Six sigma principles, lean principles are popular implementations within the manufacturing companies. However, these principles and methodologies seem to be encompassing only the "makers" and not the communicators. If the marketing team is supported by providing insights to these thought processes in such a way that they can incorporate them in their daily tasks, the communication gap between the R&D/Innovators and the marketing team and thereby the customers will certainly reduce.

Implementation Strategy

The goal of a marketing person is to bring about “awareness” in terms of market needs as well as product value on both sides of the coin. But, if the marketing team does not incorporate the pillars of transparency and adaptation then neither sides of the bridge will get benefitted. It is essential that the marketing team helps the manufacturing / technical team understand not just what the relevant customers are asking/wanting in terms of their own perception, but also allow a **transparent** communication between the customers and the manufacturers themselves. In many on-field meetings/site visits/board meetings between the marketing team and the customers, when there is product evaluation, feedback, etc, very rarely are the engineers/technical team themselves involved in the discussion. Why is there a need for an A-B | B-C | B-A type of communication? Why can't there be an (ABC) communication?. This will showcase the transparency, trust amongst the three categories—A (Clients/customers), B(Marketing), C(Technical team).

There can always be a chosen representative from the manufacturing team who is good in communication and has sound knowledge about the product to join the marketing representative in discussing the needs/problems associated with the particular product in discussion. Selling/ advertising/branding are certainly traits that the marketing team members are expected to be experts in. This is not an arena where a manufacturing supervisor would want to venture even if given an opportunity. However, understanding the customer needs, their feedback, the comparison between different products in the market are areas that require the direct involvement of the technical team along with the marketing team and the customers. This is why emphasis is being made here to bring in “transparency” in the activities of the marketing department. This also allows for the removal of ‘silo functioning’ as opposed to ‘concurrent engineering’.

Adaptation- While there is support and inclusion being required from the marketing team towards the engineering team, it also becomes imperative for the engineering team members to explain the technical changes / innovation being introduced in the product to the marketing team in the most simplest manner so that the same can be explained to the outside world as and when necessary. This additionally enables the marketing team to change their way of selling/branding the product by bringing in technical aspects to the customers in a layman’s language. This requires incorporation of one of the principles of 6 sigma— Mutual trust between the employees. Engineers are often concerned with giving out too much of technical information out of insecurity of losing their “Value”. But, if there is mutual trust and a common goal of gaining a profit margin by providing excellent customer satisfaction, then showcasing technical aspects of the products to the marketing team will be easy. When the marketing team understands the required technical reasoning for the functioning of the product, it will enable them to, further, look into what the competitors are doing and bring in adaptation of new strategies to market their own products by highlighting the differences.

Kaizen (Continuous improvement): is one of the pillars of Toyota production system that talks about the need and benefits of continuous improvement. Just like, technology needs continuous improvements, innovation is the food for growth today; similarly, in the marketing field also continuous improvement on an everyday basis is essential. Implementation of latest technology, innovating methods to capture the “Trust” of the audience rather than flatter them or provide false information of the product is a pre-requisite for a successful marketing manager. Taking a step back and looking at how the product has been marketed thus far, introspecting their own pros and cons and continuously trying to improve – not just in

terms of presentation of the product but also in terms of “Transparency”, “accuracy”, “people skills”, “customer trust” will bring in a larger audience towards the company.

Just in time: (Pull system)- is another pillar of the Toyota production system where the idea is to limit work in progress/wastage. Here, the next task to perform is brought on board only after the completion of the current task and based on the needs. A similar ideology can be introduced in the marketing field where information about a new product, changes to the new product, pricing of the new product/existing product, comparison with competitors can be brought to the visibility of the customers only when necessary. This avoids “insider” problems. This requires the acumen to understand when, where, how and what needs to be communicated. Often times, when marketing managers or sales representatives work with new/old customers there is a tendency to give out “inside” information regarding new products, improvements in the existing products to the customers to buy them/gain their share. This is an incorrect approach. There is never a guarantee that by providing information regarding a product that is yet to be launched the customers will remain loyal to us. But, if we wait for the right time--- completion of one “project/ product purchase for long-term”, and then put-forward new initiatives, it shows that we value sustainability, continuity from our customers instead of the focus being “do not lose customers- so bribe them with inside information”.

Jidoka/ Automation as much as needed: Another pillar of the Toyota production system is Jidoka where automation is brought in as and when needed. Robotic responses to customer complaints and requests have become common in many e-commerce websites or even organizational websites. Rather than just gathering personal information about the customer and allowing a sales representative to call-back and repeat the questions, we can collect the data presented by the customers – use data analytics to provide a trajectory of how customers “feel”, “react”, “respond” and what they “Expect” when communicating with sales representatives. Rather than letting their inputs on the chat window be only a source of “data gathering”, one can use that information to evaluate the mindset of the customers, which will thereby help the marketing team improve their rapport with the clients in a simple manner. This, when clubbed with the methodology used in “**House of quality**”, will help the marketing team know what is the primary priority of various customers, what kind of marketing strategies have helped in the past, which strategies are useful to the customers, and where is there a need for improvement/change in the way products are being introduced to the customers.

Conclusion

In this work, an attempt has been made to bridge the gap between the customers and manufacturing team by providing ways to the marketing team to become better liaisons. A perspective of how terminologies used in the Toyota production system can be correlated to the world of marketing has been presented. Additionally, ideas to improve the efficiency of the work performed by the marketing managers by using the ideologies of operations management have also been presented. These include-Innovate approaches leading to sustainable marketing and implementation of technology for better customer management.