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Rethinking Business to Business Marketing

PAUL SHERLOCK
Foreword by Tom Peters



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**Rethinking
Business to Business
Marketing**

Dedication

*To my three sons, Liam, John, and Jim, each a budding entrepreneur in his own way, who remind me each day of the roots of entrepreneurship—
creativity, energy, and spirit of life.*

Foreword

by Tom Peters

I knew I liked Paul Sherlock's book when he put Velcro and Ziploc bags on his all-time best product list (they amaze you, he says), but left off personal computers (still a long way from being genuinely "user friendly," according to Sherlock). "Yes, yes, yes" I heard myself saying.

"Spirit," "dreams," goals that "stir the soul," "feeling the tempo" of the market, "getting the market culture into your bloodstream." And "relationships," "relationships plus magic," "intuition," "listening, listening, listening more," "integrity," "authenticity." These are a few of the surprising, and in engineer/psychologist/successful practitioner Paul Sherlock's hands, wonderful words that surface time and again in *Rethinking Business to Business Marketing*.

Technical product success is more about spirit and irrationality than analysis (by definition incapable of "creation," "breakthroughs," "profound insight") or rationality, "Hey, wait a minute," as football commentator John Madden might say. Is this book by some flake?

Hardly! Paul Sherlock, 16-year veteran of hardball marketing and product development at high-tech superstar Raychem and other entrepreneurial companies, provides detailed outlines for business plans and precise formats for market-information collection. He is as provocative while discussing—in great detail—how to cajole your way into a customer factory tour as he is when

dissecting the irrational nature of customer decision making. Customers, high-tech or low, Sherlock writes, buy into—or don't—their "valuing image" of you. If you can make them "glow, tingle," you're OK. If you can't, you're in trouble. After the fact, of course, Sherlock observes, the buyer will construct a highly analytic and articulate rationale complete with factor weightings for his or her sophisticated purchase. But these analyses have virtually nothing to do with the real decision. Such rationales are a dime a dozen, or cheaper, and can readily justify the purchase of any non-awful product from any non-awful vendor.

This is a powerful book. Its breadth is stunning. Sherlock, with formal training in psychology as well as engineering and business, tells us on one page about the overarching importance of *authenticity* in both the selling and product-development process. A page later he gives practical but novel tips for choosing exactly the "right" restaurant for your *first* meal with a prospective new-product purchaser.

At times, Sherlock just plain surprises us (provokes us?). Regardless of the sophistication of the product—his experience is largely with the most sophisticated—he urges you to listen to "what your children say." If your child calls your pet idea "crazy," think about it, Sherlock counsels. Think about it a lot.

We are told in excruciating detail about how to collect useful data from the market, how to pick the right journals to subscribe to—even how many issues to back order (about three years' worth). Then comes one of a host of surprising insights: calls are usually better than visits when trying to extract information from a would-be customer. (People have an odd tendency to tell you much more over the somewhat impersonal phone line than face to face, Sherlock tells us, with experience supported by psychological theory to back his claim.)

Then there are the utterly unique, to my experience, chapters that deal with distributor relations (courtship, marriage, maintenance, divorce), when and why to use or not use sale reps rather than a direct sales force, how to write compelling product literature (the entrepreneur/developer should always do the first draft, because only she or he has a true feel for the uniqueness of the product concept, the dream it represents), how to take advantage of trade shows (even how to most effectively staff your booth), how to give lectures that are memorable to would-be customers

or industry gurus, how to place the right kind of article in the right trade journals in a timely fashion.

Sherlock is often contrarian, and always thoughtful. Raiding star employees from competitors is kosher, he argues, as long as you are bone honest about the job you are offering. Tough hombre, this Sherlock! But then he immediately adds that when *he* hears about a very exciting job that one of his key people might fill (perhaps with a competitor), he'll quickly tell the person about it and encourage him or her to take the job if it's more challenging than the person's current slot.

Rethinking Business to Business Marketing is practical and profound. It breaks new ground (marketing, selling, middleman relationships, product development, organization) and snickers at much of conventional wisdom. It is at once wildly challenging, deadly serious, and absurdly fun. Engineers will at times run for their lives from his psychological musings. But the psychologically inclined will run just as often from his hard-nosed demands.

When you finish, you will be confused. At least that's my hope. I suspect it's Paul Sherlock's too. You will have heard a lot that's practical—his descriptions and examples of Strategy Summary Statements (page 52) alone are worth the price of the book. You will have been challenged to your core.

Sherlock won't let you get away with an iota's worth of sloppy thinking, and he's the first to acknowledge that getting up an hour earlier than the competition is a must when you're trying to nudge a complex new product into the business market. But at the same time he encourages—even begs—you to dream, to honor your intuition, to view the world as the irrational, largely unknowable, wonder that it is.

Dig in and stand by to be challenged.

Acknowledgments

My interest in marketing started at the Harvard Business School as a result of taking an outstanding course taught by Professor Robert Davis (now of Stanford University). I have since had the opportunity to practice it with one of industry's most respected and effective technical sales forces, that of Raychem Corporation, during a period of tenfold growth. These experiences, and my subsequent new-venture opportunities, have significantly influenced my ideas.

Professor Henry Riggs also then of Stanford University enlisted me to teach Industrial Marketing and subsequently encouraged the writing of this book. Marilyn Kiernan transcribed my class lectures, which served as a basis for several of the chapters, with resourcefulness, skill, and humor; Emily Madriaga and JoAnn Scaduto typed the final draft. Thanks for the great job. Patricia Davidson, Patricia Lou, and Tom Dowling were very helpful with their skillful editing. I appreciate the encouragement, help, and critical reviews by Patricia Doss. Thanks to Phyllis Sherlock for her research and comments and to John Urquart for his review of the proofs.

Additionally, several friends and associates typed, read, or critiqued various sections. Each of you knows what you did; to each of you, my heartfelt thanks.

Introduction

I have often thought an introduction or preface is written either because the author is procrastinating rather than writing the actual book or is very worried that the reader will stray from the author's perspective. Despite this inhibiting notion, I find myself compelled to start with such wallowing—but promise to keep it brief.

This book expands two notions that may be quite different from traditional concepts of business-to-business marketing and sales. The first, detailed in Chapter 3, is that real choices (among those left over after the chaff is sifted out) are as unconsciously driven, as those relating to the impulse purchasing of consumer products, if not more so. The tortuous process called analysis becomes merely rationalization for the decision already unconsciously made. The works of psychoanalyst Carl Jung are drawn upon to provide background.

The second notion, detailed in Chapter 8, is a way of looking at the quality of selling that can be applied to all situations. It discusses three cumulative hierarchical levels as the ingredients of any salesperson's performance and describes what can be done and cannot be done to select and train for such performance.

The book is a short, easy to read "complete blueprint" of how to think about, plan, and implement the marketing and sales of your product. It should be particularly useful if you are among the following:

Actual or would-be entrepreneur. Follow the steps of each chapter and you will have your marketing plan complete and overall business plan outlined.

Experienced salesperson. You will have something against which you can test your experiences.

New sales, product management, or marketing support person. You will know what both you and your boss should be doing tomorrow.

Sales or marketing manager. It gives you a checklist for the many activities you are orchestrating.

Production, finance, or engineering person. It tells you how your marketing friends are enjoying the day.

Student. It will give you a “down ‘n’ dirty” description of the real world.

The chapters are followed by questions and suggestions intended to help you relate this information to your own personal interests. I think it is worthwhile for you to write answers based upon your pet product idea. By doing so, you will end up with a complete marketing plan.

Finally, in case you do not notice, the book is not objective. It is riddled with biases, heroes, villains, and buffoons. It is serious, satirical and, I hope, instructive. Throughout, however, is the unwavering theme that integrity and authenticity must prevail in the people, products, and plan if success is to be ongoing.

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**PART
ONE**

**A New
Point
of View**

The Nature of Marketing

A surefire prelude to a boring speech is, "Let us start by defining the terms." I believe the same applies to writing, so I will not start with a tortured, pompous definition of marketing. In fact, even trying to think of one reminds me of a college sophomore trying to write a definition of life in Philosophy 1.

As you read the book, two realizations possibly will start creeping over you. The first will be that "marketing is very easy." It is easy and simple because this book describes marketing without pretense, contrived concepts, mathematical formulae struggling for relevant applications, and protective jargon. At the same time it does offer much practical advice.

The second realization may be that "marketing is very difficult," because my version of it does not offer you a crutch of jargon and formulae but rather taxes you as a person to the very ultimate, where your energy, creativity, wisdom, intuitiveness, ability to respond quickly and appropriately, resourcefulness, and integrity must be at full throttle all the time.

With this little paradox as a starter, let us look at the process of marketing.

The Marketing Process

"Once upon a time" all products started as the dream of some entrepreneurially spirited person. This will continue to be so.