

Book Review for 11/09/03 by Myron Leonard

Title: "Adventures in Misplaced Marketing"

Author: Herbert Jack Rotfeld

Publisher: Quorum Books

Length: 233 pages

Price: \$59.95

Reading time: 18 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average, 4 = outstanding)

The modern marketing concept, with its focus on creating consumer satisfaction, makes marketing seem beyond reproach. However, Herbert Jack Rotfeld focuses on the uses, and frequent abuses, of marketing analysis. His book, "Adventures in Misplaced Marketing," offers a collection of clearly observed case studies drawn from his personal research and study. They deal with the realities of marketing and its limitations. He argues that marketing can only serve consumer predispositions, and can not guarantee customer satisfaction. When marketers lose sight of this they ignore their market. Rotfeld shows what can happen when relationships with customers are misperceived - marketing gets "misplaced."

Marketing can be misplaced in the sense that it is "lost" or missing when a business, government agency, nonprofit organization, or other group could follow the basic dictates of a marketing perspective but do not. In these instances, marketing tools or tactics are used without reference to a strategy or customer-based perspective that a marketing orientation would require. Marketing can also be misplaced in that it is being used in the "wrong" place. In these instances, it may be "properly" used and applied for a product or service but may be detrimental to a societal interest.

While it is seldom discussed in textbooks, many modern businesses still follow a production or selling orientation. The author suggests that in such cases marketing can be misplaced in the sense of being "lost." Since companies are making marketing decisions simply because the manager finds it interesting, or if the product has a feature because the company "can" add it, but the business decision makers don't ask if they "should," marketing remains just selling. Often, marketing gets "misplaced" because the planners or managers don't ask how the product or service could meet consumer needs.

There exist numerous examples of cases when people decide to use advertising to "sell" a social idea. In New Zealand, city school districts no longer require children to attend the nearest neighborhood school. Instead, parents can send them to whatever public school they think might be doing a better job of providing a quality education. Since each school is funded based on the numbers of students that enroll, the school administrators believe that they must advertise to attract students. Just what those ads should say, or if advertising should be used at all, is never really questioned, but the schools feel they must do "something" to attract students.

Of course, even if critics believe that marketing is misplaced, that does not necessarily mean it should be banned. However, it could be a source of problems. Calling the problem "misplaced marketing" provides a context for understanding mistakes or unintended consequences. For marketing practitioners and academics, this book is a unique study of how marketing and consumers interact. It also provides an unusual examination of the entire relationship of a business to its customers.

Myron Leonard is professor of marketing in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. His research interests include marketing education and services marketing.