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Inside the Mind of the Marketer

Oct 2, 2006

-By Kenneth Hein

Ever wonder what goes on inside the heads of the most successful marketers? What makes these people tick? What it takes to be really good? *Brandweek* thought it's a question worth asking. And you might be surprised at some of what we found.

It's something so obvious that few in the marketing profession have probably even thought about it: How do you do what you do?

No, really. While every marketer knows the mechanics of his or her job, its skill sets and requirements and vagaries, what's a good marketer really made of? What creative forces and unique quirks combine to formulate the successful strategies that define the best minds in this business? Say, for instance, you were to find a way to peer into the mind of a cutting-edge marketer, a la Being John Malkovich. What would you find there?

We wondered about this. So this past summer, Brandweek approached nearly six dozen CMOs, agency execs, professors and consultants with a deceptively simple query: "Marketers, what makes you tick?"

It is, of course, a question far tougher to answer than ask, but then again aren't all of the good ones? We asked them questions by phone or in person, and let them ramble and free-associate. We also gave some of them a seven-question quiz to complete, designed to tease out creative influences that the marketers themselves may not have considered. This call for explanation was less a scientific experiment than an essay assignment. There were no linear, empirical definites that emerged, such as: "Neuron A crosses synapse B, triggering decision to sign LeBron James to six-year sponsorship deal." No. Rather, ours was an effort to have the members of the corporate food chain—those who arguably have the most complex (and possibly the most fun) jobs—sit down, take a few moments and explain themselves.

This, they did. One respondent detailed how the 11 years he spent captive to a religious cult has since given him a keen glimpse into the power of persuasion. Others actually cited attention deficit disorder as a benefit that allows them to bounce from one idea to the next without wasting time over-thinking any one of them. While our exercise was hardly a methodical one, it did manage to part the curtain—ever so briefly—to the backstage areas of the marketing process.

And back there, more common and rational themes also emerged: an ability to listen and discern; a preoccupation with the future; a skill for asking the right questions (and not being afraid to ask the wrong ones); comfort with risk, and with wielding authority; and a willingness—indeed, a zeal—to

create something out of nothing. These were some of the building blocks of the marketing mind as we found them. There were, of course, so many more, and that very multiplicity was, in itself, its own factor. Marketers, we found, were literal sponges, soaking up the countless bits of social and cultural intelligence that's hurled at the masses each day in the form of everything from music to television shows [see pages 20 and 21], and then synthesizing them in a way that assists the development, growth and promotion of their brands.

What, then, really does lie within the mind of the brand manager? A lot of what you'd expect, and plenty of what you wouldn't.

What's It All About?

In keeping with the previous ADD comment was the notion that creative marketing has less to do with an individual's intensely applied mental labors than

his or her ability to synthesize large amounts of input from others. Alison Larkan, who in addition to having a Ph.D. in organizational psychology is human resources director at G.S. Schwartz public relations, noted that it's not so much about what makes marketers tick, but consumers that drive the thought process of the brand manager. "They are inspired by the motivation and psychology of other people," she said. By contrast, she added, "A dentist isn't. Marketers want to find out what the customer needs and what to offer that their competitors don't. They love having the power of persuasion. That gives them a little kick, the ability to exert some form of influence."

Another critical ingredient in the marketing mind was a requisite enjoyment of responsibility and with exercising authority. Simply put, some marketers so enjoy their power, it's as though they consider themselves sociological superheros of sales.

Baruch College professor Robb Hecht put it this way: "The power of brands is what attracts people to marketing. Most marketers want to work on the biggest brands, brands [with sales] the size of some countries' gross national products. Many marketers, once behind the dashboard of driving a brand, feel the power of the reach of a brand."

So are marketers merely an army of egomaniacs? Possibly. "I'm not sure if it's ego as much as the excitement of communication and affecting buying decisions," hedged Sean Bisceglia, president of Aquent Marketing Staffing, Chicago, which places about 1,000 marketers a year and has 65,000 names in its database. (While that may seem like a lot, it isn't considering there are as many marketing professionals in the workplace as there are people in the state of Delaware or South Dakota—approximately 750,000, per the American Marketing Assn.)

So who are these hundreds of thousands? One way of finding out is to piece together a collage of their thoughts, preferences and choices that best explain the brains behind the branding.

A good place to start is Stuart Redsun, Sony's svp-corporate marketing. Redsun, who joined the electronics giant in July after stints at Nike, Motorola and Gateway, summed up the marketing position this way: "Everyone else in the company has to think from the company's perspective. How will this work for the company? We have to think from the consumer's perspective."

Pizza Hut CMO Bill Ogle echoed that sentiment. "Marketers are the soul of the company. Finance is always running numbers. Other departments [have other internal concerns] that they get all geeked up

about. Marketers are the ones with the smiles on their faces. They get to be excited about creating something from nothing."

How excited? Some actually compare it to sex. "Marketing is the art and science of understanding why people do what they do and then influencing them to do something you would like them to do," said former auto industry exec and current Carlson Marketing Group CEO Jim Schroer. "What could be more fun than this, with the possible exception of sex? Which, in a way, is a very similar thing."

Others view marketing as a literal art form. Cathy Nemeth, McDonald's vp-global marketing, said, "You have to understand mankind by walking the walk like an author does, or a painter. There's so much to be seen through a marketer's eye. You have to see the fun, real side of life and how the brand fits into it."

If that sounds a little esoteric, try adding clairvoyance. Marketers also told us about their preoccupation with the future: anticipating it, what it might bring and how that might change and influence their brands. "You almost have to be psychic," said Cinco Calfee, senior manager of strategic marketing at Samsung Telecommunications America, Dallas.

Sony North American CMO Mike Fasulo agreed: "We have to anticipate. We look at what will intrigue people in the future."

Marketers like Calfee aren't spending too much time on the phone with the psychic hotline though; they're too busy doing research. When looking to make decisions such as whether Samsung ought to sign Justin Timberlake (it did), "We read all of the music publications and industry and trade publications. We do extensive research."

Marketers identified a pillar of their job as the willingness and ability to ask the right questions. Deb Dudley, dir-marketing at the State University of New York at Potsdam, likened those in the field to a 3-year-old who wants to know why their mother wears lipstick: "What is that mommy? Why do you like it? Why does it make you feel pretty? Why is it pink? Can it be a different color? What is it made out of? Can I eat it? Why not, mommy?" Finally, Dudley said, "We've asked enough questions to identify the core essence of something and feel comfortable translating it to others."

Another childlike attribute many marketers share is a propensity for nightmares—or, at least, irrational fears—said 15-year industry veteran and Elizabethtown College assistant marketing professor Bryan Greenberg. "The marketer's mind is all about fear," he said. "It's fear of what the other guy is doing. Fear that what they're doing doesn't work. Fear of what they're not doing does work." Greenberg served up an example of a friend who worked at a movie studio who was less concerned about creating an effective campaign and more concerned about "covering his ass." He copied whatever his competition did because "if he didn't do what Mr. Y did and his movie bombs, he'll get ripped for not doing what Mr. Y did, even if it was just a big waste of money."

Which raises another key attribute of the marketing mind: It seemsthat, commonly, it functions out of a genuine affection for the task—not necessarily the recognition or compensation that results. While it's a cliché that success means loving what you do, in the case of marketers (at least the most successful ones) it would seem to be true. "Marketing people aren't necessarily driven by the salary on their W-2s. They're people spending 12 or 15 hours a day working their jobs," said Bill McInerny, president of MarketingCentral, Atlanta. "You don't find many people working the hours they do for the amount of money they make."

They Don't Get No Respect

While a good number of CMOs aren't likely to go hungry anytime soon, many marketers still feel they are neglected when compared to other C-level positions. As a matter of fact, only 10% of CMOs believe their executive peers see them as strategic and highly influential, according to a study cited in the new book, *Marketing Champions: Practical Strategies for Improving Marketing's Power, Influence and Business Impact*, co-authored by Roy Young, Allen Weiss and David Stewart.

"Many [CMOs] don't feel like they get a lot of respect," said Stewart. "The respect issue grows out of the fact that unlike a CFO, who can put hard numbers on the table, or an operations person—who can talk about how many widgets were produced—marketers can't explain very well what they contribute. If you ask 20 different people what marketing is, you'll get 20 different answers." [Ed. note: turn back to the definitions provided on page 19 for further proof.]

Perhaps marketers are treated differently because the rest of the organization doesn't know what to make of these creative types. Jay Lipe, president of Emerge Marketing, said the profession requires a "a personality that's part project manager, a pinch of accountant, a dash of salesperson, a touch of high-wire acrobat, a twist of commodities broker and an ample amount of lounge entertainer. Sadly, I fit this description to a 'T.'"

So there you have it. Marketers are egomaniacal, power hungry, fearful, high-wire walking 3-year-olds who feel like they don't get enough respect or money. Or something like that. (Note to the reader: A sense of humor also is an essential attribute. If you don't have one, try finance.)

Inside the Mind of the Marketer--Q&A: No Lying. Who's on Your iPod right now?

Heck, it could be the soundtrack to the next commercial they're working on. Despite—or possibly because of—the fast pace of the marketing world, most marketers preferred to have something decidedly mellow on their playlists. Then again, rocking out was sometimes on the agenda, too.

1. James Blunt
2. John Mayer
3. Jimmy Buffet
4. The Shins
5. Bebel Gilberto
6. Johnny Cash
7. Robert Randolph & The Family Band

8. Sublime
9. Frank Sinatra
10. Michael Buble
11. Robert Cray
12. The Dave Matthews Band
13. Train
14. Santana
15. U2
16. Wolfmother
17. Gnarl Barkley
18. The Kinks
19. Mary J. Blige
20. And the compilation Futurism 2

List Your Most TiVo-ed Shows

As with books, the choice of TV shows can say a lot about someone because it represents the choice of how to spend precious leisure time. In the case of a marketer, however, it's all the more telling (TV is, among other things, a pantheon of commercial messages). Judging from our inquiry, it seems that marketers use TV primarily as a

vehicle from which to absorb culture at large. But, judging from the choices (not listed in order), it also seems to be just as fine a way of vegging out.

1. Entourage (most frequently mentioned)
2. Lost
3. Deadwood
4. The Sopranos

5. Six Feet Under
6. American Idol
7. Family Guy
8. CSI (take your pick)
9. The Closer
10. Project Runway
11. ESPN SportsCenter
12. The Colbert Report
13. What Not to Wear
14. House
15. Seinfeld
16. The Apprentice
17. Boston Legal
18. Grey's Anatomy
19. Big Love
20. 24

Inside the Mind of the Marketer--Q&A: What Do You Hate Most About Your Job?

Understanding how successful practitioners do their jobs can often mean uncovering what they would change about the job if they could. Marketers are no exception. Here's what ours said they would banish from their work lives:

"Maverick sales people who don't give a crap about marketing." —Kristy Cornell, dir-marketing, McBride

Electric & McBride M-Power Nationwide

"The struggle with non-marketing/sales colleagues that miss the point." —Jim Lenaway,

market segment mgr, Control Chief Corp.

"Get rid of corporate politics that get in the way of great creative."

—Miki Reilly-Howe, vp-strategy, Deskey

"Less decision by committee."

—Lisa Hanly, brand director, Dr. Scholl's Footwear

"The salary." —Numerous respondents

"We all need to smile and laugh a bit more; frown and complain a bit less.

—Jim Schroer, CEO, Carlson Marketing Group

"Having to explain to people outside the industry what we actually do."

—Melissa Stevens, president, fogartykleinmonroe

"It would be my pleasure to transfer budget reconciliation to another department."

—Lynn Lackey, brand manager, Campari

"Endless hours, since now I am marketing to the entire world, I seem to find myself working nearly 24 hours a day." —Alex Michaels, founder, Prelude2Cinema

"The perception that anyone can do marketing. Someone once told me, 'You only need a gut for marketing, everything else requires a brain.' Also, apparently, an ass." —Gwen Bargetzi, dir-marketing, Hilmar Ingredients

"The constant changing of budgets, markets and priorities that make marketing too-often a 'bash- the-gopher' exercise." —Barry Bronson, communi-

cations & corporate affairs, Ashland/Valvoline

"If I could waive my magic wand, I would take the emotion out of difficult situations, whether a client is in crisis or co-workers are having a difficult conversation. Problems can be solved quicker and easier when dealing with them intellectually."

—Dan Sondhelm, partner, SunStar

"I'd like to bring back the three-martini lunches."

—Christine Tieri, creative director, Smith & Jones

Inside the Mind of the Marketer--Q&A: So What Exactly Does "Marketing" Mean to You?

Asking a marketer to define marketing is a little like asking George W. Bush to define the presidency—it's a job they do with relish even if they can't articulate it all that well. Indeed, it was telling to listen to the similar themes—but different details—respondents selected to define their profession of choice. Without further ado, then, marketing is:

"Emotion. I started out as an artist. Marketing is, and has to always be, about getting an emotional response from people. So I see it the same as my art which reaches people's emotions. If you want someone to buy whatever you are selling, you can't appeal to their logic. You have to appeal to their emotion. Logic will tell them they don't need your product or they can't afford it. Emotion, the heart, will say, 'Go for it.'" —Alex Michaels, founder, Prelude2Cinema

"Marketing is the process of evaluating a need for something—finding that something—and then offering it to the potential target at a value level that makes it worth obtaining."

—Jeffry Martini, director, Superfriends Marketing & Promotions Group

"Seth Godin said it best . . . all marketers are liars. We just tell the lies people want to hear." —Miki Reilly-Howe, vp-strategy, Deskey

"Creating elegant and natural connections between sales goals and your consumer's wallets."

—Scott Fedonchik, executive dir-integrated marketing, Golf Digest

"The development of a story that entices all the right players to passionately and experientially connect."
—Lynn Lackey, brand manager, Campari

"Being able to read the Brandweek newsletter and pawning it off as research."

—Brian Stype, vp-business development, Churchill & Co.

"The large umbrella under which the many ways of communicating to the end-users find a home." —
Christine Tieri, creative director, Smith & Jones

"The right product with the right messages delivered in the right channels at the right time. Miss one of those, and say hello to the netherworld of failed products and services."

—Jenny Schmitt, president/dir-client strategy, CloudSpark

"How you make someone pick your product."

—Lisa Hanly, brand director, Dr. Scholl's Footwear

"Marketing is about purity. Putting all energy and momentum into a movement that creates that moment, that conversion point, where you get someone to get 'it,' to see and connect with what you've cultivated and created, igniting the chain of relevance to the masses."

—Rob Stone, president, Cornerstone Promotion

"All the activities that make the lead-up to making selling so easy a 5-year-old could do it. Now someone fetch a 5-year-old, as Groucho would say."

—Barry Bronson, communications and corp. affairs, Ashland/Valvoline

"It's half art and half science."

—Linda Holliday, president, Medical Broadcasting Co.

"I compare marketing to trying to meet people at a party: You hope the room is filled with people that want to meet you, you try to look your best, and stand out from everyone else in the crowd; when you meet someone, you have to have a good story—and hope they remember your name."

—Kimber Ward, marketing director, Naked Juice

"It's being able to creatively appeal and sell to your target audience a product or service they don't know they need, don't know about or, even better, don't think they want."

—Kelly Turner, asst vp-marketing, Eli Lilly Federal Credit Union

Inside the Mind of the Marketer--Q&A: Read Any Good Books Lately?

Reading means an investment of time, and since marketing is already a time-starving profession, the choice of leisure reading material can reveal much about a marketer's personality and priorities. Here are some recommended titles—both business and lay topics—which constitute an interesting soup of business books, intellectual works and some pop-culture pulp. Are any of these on your nightstand?

Best of the business books:

1. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell (one of two Gladwell titles we heard a lot about)
2. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell
3. *The Brand Gap*, Marty Neumeier
4. *All Marketer's Are Liars: The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low Trust World*, Seth Godin
5. *Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*, Keith Ferrazzi and Tahl Raz

6. The Wal-Mart Effect: How the World's Most Powerful Company Really Works—And How it's Transforming the American Economy, Charlie Fishman

7. Life after the 30-Second Spot: Energize Your Brand with a Bold Mix of Alternatives to Traditional Advertising, Joe Jaffe

8. Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands, Kevin Roberts

9. Trump: How to Get Rich, Donald Trump

10. Think and Grow Rich, Napoleon Hill

The general list:

1. Up the Agency, Peter Mayle

2. Confessions of an Heiress: A Tongue-in-Chic Peek Behind the Pose, Paris Hilton, Merle Ginsberg, Jeff Vespa

3. Eat. Pray. Love, Elizabeth Gilbert

4. Life of Pi, Yann Martel

5. Self Made Man: One Woman's Journey into Manhood and Back, Norah Vincent

6. Boogaloo on Second Avenue: A Novel of Pastry, Guilt and Music, Mark Kurlansky

7. Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, Gregory Maguire

8. The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini

9. Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle Into America's War with Militant Islam, Mark Bowden

10. Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the
Mt. Everest Disaster, John Krakauer

Inside the Mind of the Marketer--Q&A: Stop and Look: What Junk is in Your Office Right Now?

Archeology teaches that one way of understanding a society is to study its clutter. Assuming that a corollary of this rule could apply to marketers—and, more specifically, to the objects they keep around to amuse or distract them—we wanted to see the everyday detritus that accumulates around the marketing trade. Here's some of the better stuff:

1. A cell phone jammer that kills everyone's cell signal within a 40-foot radius.
2. Guitars (yes, plural)
3. Jane Austen action figure (complete with quill)
4. "A (not fake) plant I haven't watered in over a year that is still living."
5. A stuffed, 16-lb. largemouth bass with a plastic chicken drumstick in its mouth.
6. A picture of David Hasselhoff and Gary Coleman posing in front of Kitt, the talking Knight Rider car, circa 1984.

7. A book of "would you rather" questions called Zobmondo: The Outrageous Book of Bizarre Choices.

8. An Italian poster for The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, and a map of Paris

9. A whip

10. People. "We work hard and collaborate a lot so my office is usually abuzz with people and ideas."

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