

Marketing. Nowadays—at least in the relatively affluent countries around the world—there is no activity that is more relentlessly pervasive in the broader culture than marketing. Perhaps even a decade or two ago, the average American could pretty much avoid the extensive reach of marketing by simply throwing away the newspaper and turning off the television or radio...yeah, do a little electronic hibernating. But now *you* know that a huge measure of interconnectedness is the daily routine for vast numbers of people.

And that interconnectedness is facilitated very impressively through iPhones and tablets and laptops and other digital appliances, and that's now considered normal and absolutely necessary for basic communications. And that interconnectedness—whether at the personal level or the work level—is facilitated by many key platforms like Facebook and Twitter and Amazon. And that interconnectedness is largely funded by marketing initiatives, marketing outreaches, and a bundle of marketing dollars!

Indeed, the everyday deployment of marketing has changed quite radically over the past two to three decades. But have the classic core principles of marketing changed? Not at all! So let's start these episodes on marketing with the definition of marketing by the American Marketing Association. Here goes...

*Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.* Listen close—here it is again: marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. Now that sentence is revealing. There's action, with words like *activity, creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging*. And there are targets of that action like *customers, clients, partners, and society at large*. But the core goal that all these words surround—the core focus of marketing—is encapsulated in the four words that are smack in the middle of the sentence: *offerings that have value*.

Here's the deal: *offerings that have value* are the fixed, unchanging star of the marketing constellation. But *how* an organization offers value over time is very thorny: that's because in a highly competitive landscape in a free-market economy, it's the norm—in fact, it's a main focus—for many competitors to try to replace your organization's current offerings. And they are doing that from many different angles.

Take Target, for example, working diligently every day to consistently field *offerings that have value*. Let's make a list of, say, just a dozen of Target's competitors. Walmart. Walgreens. J C Penney. Best Buy. Trader Joes. The chain grocery stores, like Kroger. Dollar Tree. Macy's. Outlet stores. Malls. Amazon. And other retail websites. Wow, what a starter list...not to mention thousands more national and local competitors!

You see, Target can't succeed by just driving a stake in the ground and saying, "This is our offering, once and for all." The huge pressures on Target are coming from multiple points of attack at the same time, with the competitors all pushing *different* competitive buttons. So, Dollar Tree and Walmart and Costco are working to strip away price-sensitive shoppers. And aren't Macy's and Trader Joes very focused on a higher perceived quality of key products? And Amazon and other retail digital-shopping websites are designed for remote shopping and home delivery with an intimidating inventory breadth compared to what Target can physically carry in its stores. Now that's some huge squeezing from several key directions!

So recall those four words: *offerings that have value*. Is Target's marketing strategy more about pricing... or strong inventory breadth...or high quality of products...or a convenient place to shop? Or perhaps it's about some sort of magical mix of those? And has Target responded well to highly popular digital retail like Amazon? *These* are the issues to get *offerings that have value*. So—what do ya think—is Target positioned for long-term, sustainable success? Target undoubtedly has a strategy...but all of Target's competitors don't give a hoot about Target's realization of its strategy. Yes, all of those competitors have their *own* stewardship challenges and opportunities with their investors, their employees, and their customers. And in just doing that, they are *often effectively working to whisk customers away from Target!*

Now hold on to your hat! One of the most interesting patterns that an astute Christian businessperson finds over and over again is how the best business practices have often evolved to mimic where the Kingdom of God already has been effective for a couple thousand years. So here are some of the amazing dimensions of *offerings that have value* from the extraordinary, privileged perspective of the believer.

Right when people believe in Christ, whether that happened yesterday or last century or nearly a couple thousand years ago, they are beneficiaries of the offering to God that was made by Christ on behalf of whoever would call on the name of Jesus. Here's what Ephesians 5:2 (ESV) says: "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." The sacrificial offering on the Cross by Jesus entailed the perfecting of key dimensions of offerings established in the Old Testament, often clearly found prescribed in the book of Leviticus. That's why the writer of the book of Hebrews, communicating to Jewish Christians of course, said this in Hebrews 13:11-12: "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood." And then Titus 2:14a: "[Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness..."

Whoa, whoa, whoa, you say...what's all that got to do with *marketing*? Well, the truth is, it has *everything* to do with Kingdom marketing the good news of offerings that have value! At the Cross, Christ realized extraordinary *offerings that have value*, great value! Christ was necessarily without blemish to fulfill God's requirements, and He completely covered our sins. Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is the ultimate ideal—the offering that allows believers to be reconciled to their heavenly Father! All we must do, by faith, is accept this unique offer of the gift of God's grace that entails salvation, eternal life, Kingdom citizenship, and much more. Yes, Christ's *perfect offering that His Father has fully accepted is offered to us as the only way to the Father!* That's why the Bible says Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity!

But that's not *really* marketing, you say, that's just theology! But how about this (Romans 10:13-17): "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Come now, isn't that the best of what modern marketing aspires to, the strong messaging of the very best offerings that have value—and isn't that quintessentially *the good news of the Kingdom of God*? Of course! There's no fruit in denying the straightforward truth that the early church's missionary journeys were about the marketing of the gospel and the discipling of committed beneficiaries of the offering made on their behalf by Christ! Hey, that's discipling, then *and* now! That leads us to quote the greatest marketing imperative ever, intended to bring the very best offering of great value to all nations! Yes, God's global marketing plan is in Matthew 28:19, a command from Jesus Himself: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

So Jesus established the ultimate version of offerings that have value! But what about the problem Target has—multiple competitors? So, how about these competitors to the Cross? Islam. Buddhism. Secularism. Self-regard. Apathy. And lest we forget, Satan himself, defeated at the Cross yet still active. Well, there is one simple, timeless answer: *Christ and Him crucified* manifested the *ultimate* offering that has value!

But our tactics must morph with the times, knowing of the crafty wiles of the enemy and the lethargy that can easily set in! And much of what might be considered obstacles to the Gospel, like technology, can cut both ways. The privilege of all believers is to go forth, telling of this offering of great value! Ironic, isn't it? The *ultimate* offering—available for a couple thousand years! Marketing. Look to the Cross. Go forth.

