

Preface to

Essential and Effective Marketing for the Specialty Coffee Retailer by Bruce Milletto

The business section of your local bookstore has several shelves devoted to marketing. An Internet search of the word “marketing” delivers 75 million pages for your perusal. Because marketing is at its core the simple act of conveying information, the “information age” has spawned marketing solutions to every problem imaginable and even problems we have yet to imagine. How will we get people to buy homes on Mars? Marketing.

And yet, whether it be the owner of a small business or a room full of corporate marketing gurus, the question, “How will we market this?” always feels like it is being asked for the first time in history, and even the most experienced marketer answers that question with her fingers crossed. You can read all 75 million internet pages on marketing and feel like not one of them addresses the marketing issues you are facing today.

Though marketing professionals prefer to emphasize the creative aspects of their job, marketing is at the end of the day an economic endeavor and thus susceptible to the influences of voodoo. Like the connection between tax cuts and job creation, the connection between what PMS colors I use in my advertising and increased sales can be, if not suspect, then difficult to track beyond theory. “We know 50% of our marketing is effective,” says the VP of Marketing, “we just don’t know which half is working.” I call this The Fog of Marketing.

In *Essential and Effective Marketing for the Specialty Coffee Retailer*, the fog is lifted for coffeehouse operators. Bruce Milletto’s coffee-centric look at marketing suffers from neither vague, inapplicable, generalities or inane theoretical hairsplitting sometimes found in marketing tomes. Over the years, Bruce has helped countless coffee retailers answer the question, “How will we market this?” and he doesn’t waste any time writing about the 50% that might not work for you.

It doesn’t matter how small your company is or how cynical you might feel about the idea of marketing, you’re doing it whether you acknowledge it or not. The question is, are you doing it well? Implement only a handful of Bruce’s suggestions and the answer will be, yes. Beneath all the shiny-shoe lingo, marketing is about selling stuff. If you’re in retail, selling stuff is the reason behind everything you do, from the shirt you pick out in the morning, to wiping off the counter tops before you leave the store in the evening. Good marketing is about thinking with greater intention and purpose about all the things you do in between. ALL the things you do in between.

Is pulling a perfect shot of espresso good marketing? You bet. Sustained success in coffee must be built on a devotion to craft and quality. But quality in and of itself will never be enough to grow your business or maintain the business you have against new competition.

Consider two baristas working at competing coffeehouses. Both are exceptionally talented and committed to the art and science of not only coffee preparation, but roasting as well. Both belong to the United States Barista Guild. Both obsess over their equipment, coffee, and technique, endlessly trying to squeeze the very best out of all three. But while barista A rarely looks up from his machine, barista B makes a point of engaging customers. She occasionally offers regular drip coffee drinkers a free shot of espresso, trying to expand their coffee horizons and deepen their appreciation. She learns the preferences of customers so she can make whole bean purchasing suggestions when new coffees arrive. I would put my money on the coffeehouse where barista B is pulling shots.

The difference between these two baristas is subtle, interior, and super simple. Barista A is focused on serving a great cup of coffee. Barista B is focused on selling a great cup of coffee to the same customer over and over and over again...and to his friends, family, co-workers, and dentist too. Quality and skill being equal, good marketing wins.

Of course, as an executive at The Specialty Coffee Association of America, I feel obliged to note that the best marketing in the world can't help you if the quality of your coffee is poor. If you're not buying the best coffee you can find, whether you're buying green coffee or roasted coffee, this book won't help you much unless it convinces you to first buy great coffee and then train, train, train your staff. If you purchased this book looking for a few good marketing tips while cutting quality corners, do us all a favor, put the book on the shelf and spend 12 months focusing on improving quality in every aspect of your business except marketing before you pick it up again. I just might walk into your coffeehouse one day and I would hate to have to write on a comment card, as I have on occasion, "Great logo, too bad about the coffee."

On the other hand, if you are quality-obsessed about everything except marketing because you imagine marketing to be "all sizzle and no steak," that's okay. Turn to the title page of this book, cross-out the word "marketing" and write in its place, "Customer Communication and Education." Better? Good. Now go sell a lot of really great coffee.

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