

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PARTNERS, LLC

## The 'Dawn' of Relationship Marketing - Really?



In its January 2, 2012 issue, *Advertising Age*, the venerable “voice” of Madison Avenue proclaimed that we are now at the “dawn of the relationship era”. The magazine reports that while chief marketing officers have for the past five years talked the talk of consumers taking control, that it is now truly time to “say goodbye to positioning, preemption and the unique selling proposition”. Quite a statement from the mouth-piece of an industry that has for so long suggested mass media advertising as an effective relationship-building tool!

But more basically, we’re perplexed for two additional reasons. **First**, mainstream marketing thinking was impacted in the early 1990’s with several books on relationship marketing, including our own, *Aftermarketing* - first published in 1992. Today there are over 2,000 books on relationship marketing. This collection suggests relationship marketing is not only beyond its “dawn” - but quite likely in its “mid-day”! **Second**, we are huge believers in the value of relationship marketing because it builds positive word of mouth and stimulates referrals. But, we also see many product categories in which the importance of advertising, product positioning, promotions, etc. remains critically important.

Think about it. How often do most people strike up a conversation about or ask someone for a recommendation regarding categories like the following:

Toothpaste	Laundry Detergent	Orange Juice
Breakfast Cereal	Life Insurance	Frozen Vegetables
Magazines	Furniture	Gasoline

### Not Quite Time to Bury Traditional Marketing Tools

There are hundreds of product categories, generating billions of dollars of sales each year, which are either too private, too insignificant in price, or simply just not considered meaningful enough to prompt recommendation-giving or searching for endorsements. Add the thousands of new products being brought to market each year that need to reach a critical mass of loyal customers before referrals can really get under way and you begin to recognize that advertising, promotional support, signage, couponing and many other forms of *traditional* marketing won’t be going away anytime soon.

### New Ways to Communicate

On the other hand, would you consider staying at a hotel, booking a dinner reservation, or buying a car, a computer, or a smart phone today without tapping into private or public word of mouth? Probably not. *Ad Age* suggests that the traditional center of distributing marketing messages - the ad agency media department has to be redefined. No longer are the traditional media (TV, radio, magazines, and newspapers) the only way to spread word about one’s brand. In the world of relationship marketing, it’s virtually “everything one does and delivers that carries the brand’s message forward”. The challenge will be that even one’s most delighted customers won’t take the time to learn details about one’s product, the after-sales service provided, the character of one’s employees, one’s corporate citizenship, and so much more that can influence a customer’s relationship with a brand.

To learn more about *arming* your best customers to do more for your brand in this new era, contact us:

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