
What Does Marketing Have to Do with Engineering?

by Barry Koren, AIA, PhD



What's the first thing that pops into your head when I say the name Henry Ford? For me, it's the assembly line. But although we celebrate Ford for his production genius, his most significant contribution was his marketing genius.

Ford invented the assembly line because he had determined that he could sell a million cars if he lowered the price to \$500. Ford said that we first reduce the price.

"The new price forces the costs down....no one knows what a cost ought to be....name a price so low as to force everybody in the place to the highest point of efficiency. The low price makes everybody dig for profits. We made more discoveries concerning manufacturing and selling under this forced method than by any method of leisurely investigation."

By 1920, half of all cars sold were Fords. But despite his marketing genius, Ford also made a famous and foolish marketing statement.

They can have any color they want, so long as it's black. This was the vision of one vehicle for all.

General Motors came up with a more powerful marketing concept--provide styles "for every purse and purpose". By 1927, Ford shut down for six months and tooled up for a model change, and never caught up to GM.

Marketing is a word that most people associate with junk mail, annoying telephone solicitations, and pushiness. But that is the downside to marketing, and the side of marketing that is worth avoiding.

The bright side of marketing is its fundamental concept--we find out what a client wants and figure out how we can provide it on a regular basis and in a fiscally prudent fashion. It's a process similar to the one my doctor uses. First come probing questions, then diagnostic analysis. Prescription comes later. This is a very natural process for many engineers who have remarkable problem-solving skills.

All of this is simply an introduction. There are many things that we can talk about in the future when it comes to marketing. Harry Kuchman our renown and fearless newsletter editor -- suggested a few questions. How do you wave your own flag? How do you get new clients? How do you face the public, say at public hearings.

Here are some other ideas for upcoming articles:

- **Idea Exchange**
- **Tips, questions, and answers**
- **Marketing tools, References**

- **Marketing News**
- **Individual accomplishments**
- **Marketing ads**

How do you get this information? Observation for sure, just as you would if you were working on a renovation job. In many ways its similar to the way you'd get information if you were doing a renovation. You can get a lot of information just by looking. Some characteristics are readily apparent, like the age of the structure. Others take some probing like whether there's been water damage.

Engineering Week is coming up. It is a time when engineers get some respect and recognition for their achievements.

From a marketing point of view, one of the best ways to get recognition is to give recognition. This is what Henry Ford did just before he invented the assembly line. He came up w/ the incredible marketing idea that he would build an automobile for everyone. This was unheard of.

A marketing concept: Here's the first easy skill that you can try.

- Instant, Instinctive Marketing
- Customer service
- Niche versus specialization
- Hierarchy of communication: written, telephone, meeting

Harry Kuchman's Q's:

- How to wave your own flag.
- How to get new clients company newsletters and brochures.
- How to face the public (say at public hearings?)

disasters—how to handle them.

- What is the function of technical awards and competitions?

And now I have a question for you. Is there room for improvement in your firm's services? Are there any actions you can take now? By commenting, please let all of us know your reactions, or if you have any stories, news, or marketing tips that you want to share.

You can reach me in any of the following ways:

- Phone: (708) 445-0000
- E-mail: barrykoren@homesandvillages.com
- Mail: Barry Koren,
HomesandVillages,
312 N. Grove Ave.,
Oak Park, IL 60302.

References:

Theodore Levitt, *The Marketing Imagination* (NY: The Free Press, 1986).

Life Magazine, Collector's Edition:
AHot for the Road: 100 Years of
the Automobile in America, @
(Winter 1996 Special)
