

A NEW VISION IN SALES: SATISFYING CUSTOMER NEEDS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract: The new vision in sales requires, among other things, changing the salespeople's position towards the potential client by applying a philosophy that involves taking into consideration the people they come into contact with and providing solutions to address their needs in a disinterested manner, without having to pretend reciprocity. All this must be based on the concept of total sales utility, solutions to solve clients' immediate needs: the urgent ones, those who are directly related to them (financial needs), but also those arising from the use of goods purchased by the seller. The purpose of this article is to analyse how easily we can discover clients' real needs; under what conditions these needs can be satisfied through sales activities, and which the social responsibilities of the salespeople are.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In general acceptance, salespeople were concerned about satisfying self-interest (Charles Futrell- Fundamentals of selling: Customers for life through service, page 6), and accumulating large amounts of money, hence the resulting appearance of selfishness and loss of staff confidence of the collaborators on the market. According to the new vision in sales, the interest in customer service increases and self-interest decreases. Consequently, if traditional sellers are guided by self-interest, salespeople care about their customers, who are guided on the ethics in sales and social responsibility towards their business partners and consider that others' interest is the most important. (Charles Futrell- Fundamentals of selling: Customers for life through service, page 7). As this kind of attitude is repeated on medium and long term, its effects can be gaining the confidence of the clients, their loyalty and thus increase sales.

If the salespeople's attention is directed to the customer interest, what happens to their motivation? To what extent are salesmen interested in placing the customer on the first position?

This policy represents the beginning of the involvement strategy is social life, in life community, that can be transformed into a partnership, in which the company has only benefits in return. The profit analyzed from this point of view may have effects on long term, based on emotions and trust or on the short term by attracting new customers or maintaining the current ones.

2. OBJECTIVES

It is time for changes in sales, and in marketing, in general. Competition is very high, and globalization gives rise to further, new trade policies, more "exotic" methods for calling attention to the products offered to the market. It can be said that the methods used so far do not meet the new requirements of the market and remain very expensive, which makes it extremely hard to fight with the competition that always launches products at low prices. Sergio Ziman in his book "The End of Marketing" states that "the marketing era as we know it is gone" and that it is time for the adoption of new methods of creating emotion among clients, and to focus on what we can do in order to convince prospective customers to buy the merchandise.

It means that since the launching of a business this will stand out from the anonymity. The method used until now is the aggressive advertising, expensive and artistic moments that capture attention more than the commercial message, and marketing in itself. This can be corrected in two ways:

- a. Changing the content of the commercial to focus more on the marketing message and less on the artistic one. This goal can be achieved by using social messages, through the fill mode on which the product can solve social problems, thus increasing the confidence in both the company that produces it, and in the product itself.
- b. Adapting the methods to create trust and a wish for partnership with the company that sells products by simply buying them. Here we can mention as the safest method with the most secure effects, the one that shows involvement in social life by increasing the social responsibility of companies. In the era of globalization, when global companies create their production units or sales networks in other world markets than the nearly residence, they are almost obliged to integrate it into the local community either by the localization of certain components of their finished products, or through their involvement in local social life. Its result will also be the preparation of the local market, counting on the fact that it is unlikely to assume that the marketing success at the macroeconomic level can be achieved with the hostility of the local market.
- c. In general, the problem of the acceptance or rejection of the globalization phenomenon arises, taking into consideration the fact that traditional aspects must be kept. In reality, globalization is hard or even impossible to stop and then, the real question is if the local communities are trained or not to manage globalization and the funds used for the conservation of traditions will bring profit or not. Companies knowing these concerns at the local level are increasingly involved in social life through either permanent or occasional activities, when the situation is favourable for them. In this way, it meets the concerns of the local community in managing globalization.
- d. The effects of the appearance of a new business into a local community can be various: creating new jobs, paid taxes, increase (or not) of the purchasing power, infrastructure development, logistics, the involvement of specific employees from the microenvironment marketing (customers, suppliers, banks, competition, etc.), business environment improvement, the influence on the country's trade balance through exports and imports. All of these, plus others, remain at an abstract level, if the companies do not assume the social

responsibilities that can have the following effects: the consideration of the product created / sold as a local one, and the constant increase of confidence in this measure.

- e. Sale activity can be done only by personal contact, through the interaction between the seller and the buyer. The buyer is prepared for any purchase of a product through specific marketing activities such as advertising, fairs and exhibitions, etc.

Advertising as previously stated, has not only commercial or artistic effect, but also a social one, sometimes forming mentalities that may have sensitive influences at the behavioural level. We should note that these effects can be not only positive, but also negative, and the latter can generate "disturbances" in an individual's personal and social life.

In this case, the social responsibility of the company gets new turnings, turning charity into required actions, more often than not professional, in order to keep the neutrality of the psychological level of the individual after an aggressive advertising. The seller may have an important role in this process, through specific methods of communication used in direct talks with the buyer, and with potential clients. In this case, respecting sales ethics means applying the golden rule of direct selling, treating the customers with honesty and equality, and putting their interests ahead of the interests of the company or personal interests of the seller (Charles Futnell- Fundamentals of selling: Customers for life through service - page 6).

3. METHODOLOGY

If we realize that the market evaluates more and more the companies through their involvement in the social life of the community they belong to, the result shall be that social responsibility does not mean donations and charity, but creating conditions for increasing brand awareness and trust with the immediate effect on increasing the interest in the products offered and higher sales. An example in this respect is the one of an automobile company which, anticipating that it is about to lose the appreciation of local community members, adopted a policy of involvement in the life of this community by cleaning the public garden and providing it with garden furniture. This initiative was applied on long term and the result was not only the company's having gained the appreciation of the community, but also their having provided a means to educate and change mentalities. An analysis is required here in two ways:

- The purpose of social involvement of the company in the local community was to provide an example of voluntary action in a period in which it declined to extinction and give a push to the authorities to resume initiatives in this regard;
- The company bet states that after the accomplishment of the purpose, the company will be seen in the local market and raise potential customers' trust in the products they are offering.

The responsibility of any company is to act so as to contribute to the welfare of both the company, but also to satisfy the interests and welfare of the society (Charles Futrell- Fundamentals of selling: Customers for life through service, page 70).

4. ANALYSES

"Need" as a notion in itself should be rephrased, as it refers both to the coverage of a specific need, and to the idea of taking into consideration the resources available to address the potential customer in order to satisfy this need. To this respect, resources are considered another need or an extension of the initial need. After the analysis of "needs" as a whole, while taking into account the environment in which the potential customer lives, we can deduce not only the economic, but also the social objectives on short, medium and long term.

Social responsibility is a policy of the present, but especially of the future.

Sales represent a very sensitive field, which depends, to a great extent, on consumers' behaviour. In its turn, this behaviour is influenced by the way in which the production/ sales company is known and appreciated on the market. In this respect, these companies' social responsibility becomes a novelty and this turns it into a policy of the future. It will be very difficult to anticipate the transformations which are to come together with the evolution of the free market, where consumers will demand that more and more products they buy come from a high morality company. As it is already known, the basic rule of sales is first and foremost the respect for buyers through honesty and goods meant to really satisfy their needs, buyers' own interest being, thus, a priority. From this perspective, companies' social responsibility becomes a necessity, a means through which they will be able to cope with the future, with a regard to their business as genuine social business (Muhammad Yunus - Building Social Business: The New Kind of Capitalism that Serves Humanity's Most Pressing Needs).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The social responsibility of companies is a moral obligation and it is related to the applied ethics in the general policy of the company.

The interaction of firms with community can be done through specific actions: sponsorships, donations, volunteering, marketing, etc., but also through a decent trade policy, always clear, and permanently adapted to the reality. The actions with social character follow not only the idea to obtain favourable economic effects for the company, but also for local community members:

- Increased company awareness using social actions for promotion, including the products they offer on the market, and having as a final goal the increase of the sales volume;
- Social Actions for creating nurseries, kindergartens, schools, clubs, for the family members of the employees can be made in order to increase employees' involvement in a correct working atmosphere with effects in increasing labour productivity. Another effect of this policy is the possibility of selection of qualified personnel in the recruitment process due to increased interest in hiring local community members;
- There are some companies which have as an object the manufacture and sale of harmful products (cigarettes). In this case, the companies have the moral obligation to intervene to disseminate the harmful effects through information campaigns, equipped with medical equipment of certain wards in hospitals, etc;
- In the situation of a strong competition, sometimes companies use social responsibility strategies for creating or enhancing the existing brand. The effect

of such an approach will have direct implications over the sales volume. In order to obtain the desired result, some companies include departments that will take care of this kind of social actions in their organizations;

- Any company is part of a marketing environment - marketing micro-environment- in which they interact directly with suppliers, customers, banks, but also broadly-marketing macro-environment – where the company's activity is influenced by laws, social conditions, etc. In this way, any company, while acting directly and immediately in order to have profit, is closely related to the market acceptance of its products which means that they must be within a quality standard expected by the market and hence the social responsibility of the company to produce and deliver quality products. This social responsibility appears both as a result of the imposed requirement by the business environment, but also as an own policy of any company that wants to succeed on the market with quality products;
- The success achieved by a company through increasing sales can be considered a fulfilment of its social responsibility obligation by maintaining employment, payroll, and increasing purchasing power;
- The marketing macro-environment in which the firm operates also implies compliance with the legislation and the rules adopted by central and local community. The social responsibility of the compliance with the legal framework in terms of sales is very high if we take into account the fact that salespeople directly relate to customers and are bound by law in the act of sales;
- A company demonstrates ethical and social responsibility by offering alternatives/ equal offers for all customers, and making sure that the company is not the only one that has a gain, but also its customers and the society in general;
- Charitable actions, aids, and sponsorships should not be overlooked, as they represent volunteering activities which are very well received by the community.

Social responsibility of companies becomes more and more expected by a local society. It requires special policies for any company, and salespeople may be the main pawns in pursuing these policies.

This means that companies, in their action regarding social responsibility, have two targets:

1. To integrate in the local community through their social actions and to cover a part of their company's influences upon the environment;
2. To develop a way to promote their own companies via the acknowledgement both of products offered to the market, and of their production units and sales networks.

It is difficult to forecast that the business of the future will be done by corporations without taking into consideration managerial policies' social aspect. As far as marketing and sales are concerned, it is mandatory to mention the fact that they will have to be involved in discovering customers' needs and to satisfy both their obvious, and hidden ones. In future, complementary needs will surely be socially connected.

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