

# A Mighty Wind

**T**he notion of “shopper marketing” has spawned a whirlwind of activity rarely seen in the marketing community. But amidst the tsunami-level of noise there is a quiet rumbling that all might not be well in shopper-marketing land. Big wind. Not much rain.

The issue is whether real, sea-changing programs are truly being activated at retail. After all the data has been tumbled, the insights wrung out, and the need-states defined, then what?

What, exactly, is happening to change shopper behavior to the benefit of the brands that have been expending all this time, effort and resources? Alas,

all too often, the end result is merely another FSI or promotional display.

Except at Wal-Mart. In the land of the “sea of blue,” real change is really happening. Successful marketers have established themselves in Bentonville to be close enough to Wal-Mart to foster true collaboration. This collaboration happens at many levels, including supply chain, marketing, and sales. Top-to-top meetings help facilitate win-win scenarios.

If this is working at Wal-Mart, you can bet the rest of the retail industry will not be far behind. The implications of this cannot be underestimated because it underscores what some practitioners of shopper marketing may be missing.

And what is that? It's that Wal-Mart is a retailer. Could it be that shopper marketing isn't really all about the shopper? Maybe it's first and foremost about the *retailer*?

## RETAILER INSIGHT FIRST

It's wonderful to bring shopper insights to retailers. It's very cool. But do retailers really find value in insights presented from a marketer's panoramic view of things like the “aspirational” shopper versus the “value” shopper?

What retailers want to know is how your brand can contribute to growing their categories or build shopping-basket size as part of their marketing strategies. They need to improve throughput efficiencies at checkout and differentiate themselves from competitors. They may or may not find sustenance in our pontifical presentations; what they really need is for us to help them solve their business problems.

That's why brand-focused “shopper insights” may be far less important than “retailer understanding.” If you don't know where Wal-Mart—or any other retailer—is headed, or how they feel about the importance of your categories to their strategies, no amount of “shopper insight” will take you there.

Maybe shopper marketing isn't about the softer side of awareness and attitudes; maybe it's more about the hard truths of categories and sales.

If that's the case, we need to think about what might be the logical conclusion. And that is that shopper marketing should report to the sales department, not the marketing department.

Heresy? Maybe. This notion certainly appears to be at odds with where the industry is heading. According to a recent *Hub* survey, 40 percent of brand marketers have shopper-marketing reporting to the marketing department, while just 25 percent say it is reporting to the sales department.

Maybe companies should reconsider, though, because Sales is closest to, and has the keenest understanding of, retail. Marketing people often don't have a broad understanding of retail because generally they are not tasked with going into stores and figuring out what makes them tick. It's just not what they were trained to do.

Another important argument for shopper marketing to report to Sales is that the primary evaluation of shopper marketing programs is R.O.I. The sales organization understands that the ultimate goal is to move product and drive growth.

Then there's the additional reality that 75 percent of marketing budgets ends up in the hands

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