

PRAISE FOR *STAND-OUT MARKETING*

‘Based on highly credible, thorough research, this pragmatic book deals with an age-old problem of how to give customers something of stand-out value that they are prepared to pay for. I commend it to you.’

Professor Malcolm McDonald, Emeritus Professor, Cranfield University School of Management

‘For organizations to stand out they need people to stand out. This book offers invaluable advice, based on credible research, about how your marketing and sales professionals excel now and into the future.’

Clare Kemsley, Managing Director, UK and Ireland, Hays Marketing

‘After more than 30 years in B2B sales and marketing, specializing in business turnarounds for the last decade, it always amazes me how many companies fail to do the fundamentals of positioning their business in a hyper-competitive marketplace, let alone have the competencies to do so. *Stand-Out Marketing* makes you look in the mirror and identify some potentially uncomfortable truths, while providing some fantastic insights on sharpening your clarity and cut through to target customers. A book I would highly recommend and will often come back to.’

Tom Craig, CEO, Craig Roxburgh Consulting, former Group Director, Vodafone Business Services, former President, IP Networking, BT Global Services

‘Customers today are overwhelmed with information to help them make choices. The fact that organizations all seem to offer the same things that don’t appear to help customers, often means customers are paralyzed as the choice becomes too difficult. If you want to find out how to help your organization develop the competency to swim away from this “sea of sameness” and differentiate yourself, you *must* read this book!’

Colin Shaw, CEO and Founder, Beyond Philosophy

‘Great to find a book that recognizes that to give customers something meaningfully different, you need the people competencies and the leadership to be able stand out from the crowd. A must-read for sales and marketing leaders who want to develop the talent to set their organization apart.’

Andrew Crouch, CEO, UniTek Global Services

‘It’s increasingly hard for businesses to differentiate themselves in today’s hyper-crowded marketplace. Far too many companies are pumping out the same bland messages that fail to resonate with customers. This excellent book equips sales and marketing professionals with the capabilities to stand out in this “sea of sameness”.’

Nick de Cent, Editor-in-Chief, *The International Journal of Sales Transformation*

‘Top-performing companies that get ahead of the competition have great alignment between sales and marketing rooted in customer thinking. I commend this book as it provides great clarity for both marketing and sales leaders about the competencies required to develop and deliver outstanding customer value.’

Andy McFarlane, Enterprise Value Creation Executive, Telstra

Stand-Out Marketing

*How to differentiate your organization
in a Sea of Sameness*

Simon Kelly
Stacey Danheiser
Paul Johnston



Publisher's note

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*To our mothers, Mary Kelly, June Johnston and Phyllis Ekstrom – for
instilling in us a love of learning and inspiring us to try new things.*

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FOREWORD

All products today are excellent, a fact that I have had confirmed by thousands of delegates at my conferences over the past few years (using computerized audience response systems to ensure confidentiality and honest answers). Let's face it, products have to be excellent today for them even to be considered by customers. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that functionality will be the deciding factor.

This, however, presents a major challenge for suppliers and they have to find some way of differentiating themselves.

The authors of this book cleverly spell out this dilemma by using the expression the 'Sea of Sameness'. In the fast-moving consumer goods domain, which I knew well as Marketing and Sales Director of Canada Dry, the big supermarkets used to refer to such products as 'pimply little me-toos' and guess what? Yes, they used to drive the prices of such products down.

The truth, of course, is that it is the depth of knowledge the supplier has of their customers and their business that matters today, as they are then capable of building trusting relationships that don't just help them avoid disadvantage, but which create advantage for their customers.

Is it worth doing what the authors call 'Stand-Out Marketing'?

I can tell you that after a long career in B2B marketing and in particular from my experience with my Key Account Management Global Best Practice research club at Cranfield University School of Management (sponsored by the likes of 3M, Siemens, Rolls-Royce and many others and still going strong), it most definitely is. Buying directors over the 23-year life of the research club always confirm that it is only a tiny percentage of suppliers who create advantage for them and for them they are prepared to pay a price premium of up to 25 per cent and often much more. All the others are subjected to severe discounting.

There are, of course, other books which promise to achieve the same as this one. This one, however, is different and lives up to its promise.

In a world where many see the destiny of marketing as the operational use of digital technology and software application skills, *Stand Out*

Marketing is a welcome call to refocus management attention on strategic marketing competences vital for achieving sustained competitive advantage and increased shareholder value.

I commend it to you.

*Professor Malcolm McDonald MA (Oxon) MSc PhD DLitt DSc
Emeritus Professor, Cranfield University School of Management*

PREFACE

Why read this book

On 19 August 2019, 181 CEOs gathered at the Business Roundtable led by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland to formally sign a declaration to recognize that the role of a company has evolved. This one-page declaration reads:

Each of our stakeholders is essential. We commit to deliver value to all of them, for the future success of our companies, our communities and our country (World Economic Forum, 2019).

This is a big shift, as it rejects the previously held popular belief established by Milton Friedman in 1970 known as the ‘shareholder theory’ which states that a company only exists to make its shareholders money. This new charter recognizes that shareholders are just ONE of the groups of stakeholders that companies are responsible for and reminds organizations not to ignore their customers, employees, suppliers and communities.

We wholeheartedly agree with this new assertion, but there’s one thing that you may subtly miss when you read the new declaration. The word ‘value’ assumes that companies know what their stakeholders value and how to deliver it to them. But, as we reviewed in-depth in our previous book, *Value-ology*, ‘value’ is often poorly defined and misinterpreted. We like to say that value is in the eye of the beholder because everyone gets to decide for themselves exactly what they value – and subsequently how they spend their time, talents and money.

Our latest research found that whilst 83 per cent of the B2B marketing and sales leaders we surveyed said that it was ‘extremely important’ to be able to clearly articulate what makes their solution different to prospective customers, only 24 per cent of organizations claim to be ‘effective or extremely effective’ at differentiating themselves.

Our belief is that many organizations are failing to differentiate themselves because:

- they don’t fully understand the importance of having a unique value proposition;
- they have an internal-only view of what customers want.

And perhaps the biggest discovery that we made:

- their marketing and sales teams lack the competencies needed to develop and communicate value.

One of the most common questions facing today's business leaders is 'How do we get customers to choose us over our competitors?' At a time when only 54.3 per cent of salespeople are making their quota (CSO Insights, 2018), and only 11 per cent of B2B buyers believe vendor representatives are trustworthy (Trust Radius, 2019), it's imperative to demonstrate that you understand what your customers value and can communicate how your solution solves their problem better than anything else out there.

This book was written for you, the business leader, sales and marketing professional, to help you develop the competencies to set your organization apart, advance your career and feel job satisfaction instead of frustration. We wrote it because in our experience, and from the research we have done, we know that organizations are not good at differentiating in ways that resonate with their customers. And copycat marketing and sales programmes are not only ineffective, they leave your customers feeling uninspired, bored and unmotivated to take action.

While lots of books have been written about *how* to advance your marketing and sales technical skills, not many books focus on what you, as an individual, can do to develop yourself and your team to build long-term success in marketing and sales – no matter what new technology or technique comes on the market.

The competencies we've uncovered and are about to share aren't something that will quickly go out of style or be replaced.

About the research

When we wrote our last book *Value-ology: Aligning sales and marketing to shape and deliver profitable customer value propositions* (Kelly, Johnston and Danheiser, 2017) we wanted to give business leaders, marketing and sales professionals a framework and some tools to enable them to resonate with customers by tuning in to what customers value.

The detailed research we did for *Value-ology* included in-depth interviews with marketing and sales practitioners, a practitioner survey, and lots of analysis of credible third-party research. We found that B2B organizations were clearly having difficulty living up to our definition of a value

proposition – ‘A promise of expected future value, illustrating that future relevant and distinct benefits will outweigh the total cost of ownership’ – and it was costing them in lost sales, failed bids, and fruitless marketing.

We sensed that there was a lot of ‘sameness’ out there and we saw that lots of organizations were saying the same things as each other, making it difficult for customers to choose, and leading them to choose to do nothing. In order to test this hunch, we developed a new research programme.

Stand-Out Marketing is based on research we conducted from 2017 to 2019. We sought to understand:

- the current state of how organizations are communicating their unique value proposition;
- why there seems to be a ‘sameness’ problem in customer-facing communications;
- competency gaps and priorities within the marketing and sales functions.

In the first phase, we compared websites and Twitter feeds for the largest organizations in three industry sectors: Telecommunications, Data Centres and Higher Education. Our research showed that the customers are left swimming in a ‘Sea of Sameness’ where all the companies are saying exactly the same thing to them. We explore the results of the ‘Sea of Sameness’ research in-depth in Chapters 1 and 2.

In the second phase, we conducted 1:1 interviews with over 20 business and sales and marketing leaders across a variety of industries. The combined experience of the individuals we interviewed spanned 119 companies and 54 industry sectors. We discussed the competency gaps that exist within today’s marketing and sales professionals and what organizations are doing to differentiate and stand out from the competition. We also ran an online survey consisting of over 50 global responses to further understand competency gaps and organizational priorities. Our research was conducted using academic ethical research protocols to ensure participant anonymity and consent for the use of interview quotations.

Getting the most out of this book

Through a mix of explanations, case studies from our interviews, thought-provoking questions and plenty of practical advice and exercises to implement, this book was written to help you:

- 1 diagnose where/if your organization is stuck in the ‘sea of sameness’;
- 2 understand the implications of not making a change;
- 3 provide a competency framework with ideas and strategies you can use to get out of the sea of sameness and differentiate your business.

Since the bulk of the book details the competencies that you, as an individual, can develop and prioritize for your team and company, let’s be clear that competency is much more than skill. Skill is readily trainable and focused on learning how to do a specific task, such as creating ads on Facebook. Competency, on the other hand, requires the ability to draw from knowledge and experience, blend thoughts, feelings and actions to make sense of situations and act effectively. Competency is evidence of professional insight and wisdom and involves demonstrating a high level of ability in interpretation, pragmatism, judgement and decision making.

Higher-level competency is your source of competitive differentiation. Without it, your pursuit of sustained competitive advantage will be at best hit and miss and at worst an ongoing miserable journey of below-average performance. The right people with the right abilities, working together in the right culture is the only path to sustained successful performance: after all, business is and always will be about people.

Ultimately this book is here to help you answer two questions:

- 1 Do our business leaders, sales and marketing people have the competency to help your organization stand out?
- 2 If you are a marketing or sales practitioner this becomes a much more personal question: do *you* have the competency to help your organization stand out?

Good luck in your quest to be meaningfully different for your customers and your own company.

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