

"What is Shopper Marketing and how does it differ from Category Management?"

First, let me introduce myself and send a big "Thank You" to Kevin and Popon.net for inviting me to share some thoughts in this forum. I am now going on 15 years in the CPG business. I have done a lot of jobs, some would say too many! I began my career as a sales rep for Abbott Nutrition's retail business and quickly moved into category management at its infancy. There I found a passion for learning about consumers and why they do the things they do. I then took a trade marketing gig with Colgate-Palmolive, and then moved to the supplier side of the business with Spectra. After that, I spent 5 years with Clorox, doing consumer insights and category management. My last corporate job was as the Director of Shopper Insights for Con Agra. Now, I do some consulting, starting a new business with some friends and manage a pretty big group on LinkedIn. Whew! I told you it was a lot! I would say that I am pretty passionate about doing things that matter the most. I love to fix problems and explore opportunities. All in all, I am very curious and am usually trying to figure out why things are the way they are. Research says it's a Gen X thing, but I don't know.

Now down to business. There is a raging debate about the definition of shopper marketing and shopper insights. I'm pretty sure we won't solve it here, but at least you'll hear one man's opinion.

On the one side (usually sales and cat man people), shopper marketing is an evolution of the category management process and it is now all about "insights". On the other hand (usually agency people and brand guys) it ranges from a tactic of brand marketing to a revolutionary transformation of brand marketing. My personal opinion is that it is probably somewhere in the middle. I do not believe it is just a new buzz word, but I also recognize there are still a lot of gray areas. I believe an effective approach is to take the best minds from a brand organization, marketing research, sales and category management and form collaborative teams to approach shopper insights and shopper marketing. Brand managers traditionally have viewed retailers simply as distribution channels and a necessary evil to reach THEIR consumers. Sales and cat man folks have over-emphasized the importance of the category and think the whole business revolves the particular retailer to which they are assigned. Really, can't we just all get along? Shopper Marketing needs to take the strategic thinking and creative execution that Brand Marketing is so good at and make it cohesive with the retailer's brand, shoppers and operational realities.

One of the best examples of truly integrated shopper marketing comes from, no surprise, P&G. The Always fem care brand was experiencing a high degree of damages at the retail shelf. Stop for a minute and think this probably wasn't on the brand manager's radar; it was probably the sales team that got the brunt of this issue from the retailer. Well to understand what was happening, they conducted shopper research by actually observing people in the store shopping for the product. Lo and behold, they found that a segment of shoppers were tearing into the package to look at what was inside! The end result, still seen to this day, is a little clear "window" on the front of the package revealing its contents. This solved the problem for both the retailer and the shopper. It also shows how a team must collaborate and look at not only usage, but the shopping experience to find solutions. Traditionally packaging lies within the brand organization alone. This case shows how by working together and fully integrating shopper insights with brand management, you can solve a true shopper issue.