GENERAL DEMARKETING

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Introduction

According to Kotler and Levy (1971:75), general demarketing 'is required when a company wants to shrink the level of total demand', and 'acts by discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on either a temporary or permanent basis'. It may be surprising to realise that there would be times that a company would actively seek to decrease demand for its goods and services, especially as Kotler and Levy point out that 'the popular conception of marketing is that it deals with the problem of furthering or expanding demand' (1971:74). Indeed, when the term 'marketing' is used by critics 'it is meant to cover all the ways used by marketing to tempt the consumer into buying' (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002:525).

To understand why and how a company may be forced to, or choose to engage in demarketing activities it is therefore interesting to see how such a demand-generation view of marketing has developed.

Do marketers generate demand or meet it?

Historically, marketing had been viewed mainly from a social and economic perspective. According to Webster (1992:2) this perspective changed only in 1948 when marketing was defined as ‘the performance of business activities directed toward, and incident to, the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer or user’ (American Marketing Association, 1948:210), a perspective that further developed in the 1950s and 1960s when a managerial focus emerged to the study of marketing. Webster also found that as marketing became a more decentralised function, particularly in larger organisations, ‘the task of the marketing function was first to develop a thorough understanding of the marketplace to ensure that the firm was producing goods and services required and desired by the consumer’, employing an effective approach to managing elements of the marketing mix in order to generate customer demand (Webster, 1992:4). This perspective begins to point to some of the practical managerial issues involved in responding to a ‘thorough understanding of the marketplace’, where the marketer’s challenge is to ensure not only that the supply of goods and services deemed to be desired by the marketplace is delivered by the producer to the consumer, but also that this supply, in an ideal world, would meet the demand that the marketer has been involved in generating through the firm’s mix management activities. It is also worth acknowledging that a more production-oriented rather than marketing-oriented firm may respond to marketplace conditions of limited competition and excess demand by focusing more on profit maximisation through increased production (Kaur and Sharma, 2009). Such different organisational orientations and focus on different organisational functions and activities help illustrate the tensions involved in delivering on the marketing concept: If firms are undertaking activities to *meet* customer demand then there should be no need for demarketing; if marketing is instead about *generating* demand, it would seem logical to assume that marketing activities could affect demand either by increasing *or* decreasing it.

However, it is also recognised that affecting supply and demand can be out of the control of the marketer. For example, Patsiaouras and Fitchett (2002:161) discuss the economic depression of the 1930s and the European wartime and post-war economy where demand for consumer products decreased through macro-environmental factors, and when even ‘everyday commodities such as butter and eggs, and consumer electronics and technologies, took on luxury signification’. Nowadays in developed economies, it is more usual for consumption, at least in consumer markets, to be viewed as feeding the needs of an ever-demanding, hedonistic consumer who can discover ‘the meaning of life ... through acquisition; [and] that the hedonistic experience of material accumulation is the core object of existence on earth’ (O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy, 2002:524).

Many authors note that the marketer’s challenges have become much more complex as the marketplace, and therefore competition for market share, has become globalised. However, while overall demand for certain goods and services may indeed be globalised, demand may not be at equal levels in all of a firm’s global markets. Thus globalisation can cause problems for firms who may face wider geographical spread of excess demand, or pockets of excess demand in different countries, which means their marketing efforts may be required to focus on stimulating demand in some markets, while demarketing in others.

Contexts for general demarketing

<u>General Scarcity Economies</u>

The above example of Europe between the 1930s and 1950s, where the economies of entire nations’ were ‘plunged into a state of widespread product shortages’ (Kotler and Levy, 1971:74) illustrates that ‘at times excess demand can characterize a whole economy, and at other times, only a limited number of firms. Even in the absence of a general scarcity economy, there are always individual sellers who are facing excess demand for one or more of their products’ (*ibid* p75). In times of general scarcity, the role of marketing is not decided at the level of the organisation, as macro-environmental factors may come into play that are out of the control of the marketer and the firm. In such contexts, marketing may be perceived as having less relevance and importance than in times of excess supply, where the role of marketing in affecting the flow of goods and services between producer and consumer is more clearly evident.

Sectoral General Demarketing

It is interesting to note that the criticisms of marketing identified at the outset of this chapter are usually levied against private sector consumer marketing activities 'with next to nothing to say on business-to-business marketing. Not-for-profit marketing is similarly ignored' (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002:526). However, general demarketing can be evidenced in both of these sectors.

One good example comes from the industrial business-to-business sector. Three strategic economic options have been identified as being appropriate for oil-exporters facing a future of increased demand for energy while the world's finite natural resources are diminishing:

> '(a) to increase exports to meet increasing demand; (b) to freeze exports at their current levels; or (c) to reduce exports. The last two choices are in the order of demarketing. The first might also involve demarketing if the rates of increase were kept deliberately lower than what rates of growth in demand warrant and what the production capacities make possible' (Saddik, 1977:281).

Against this background, Saddik (1977) explored the de-marketing mix for the oil industry.

Place: Reduce the distribution of oil-exports, thus minimising supply to oil-importing countries.

Price: Oil-exporting countries could simply raise oil prices with the assumption that demand would then decrease.

In practice, both of these demarketing mix elements work in conjunction with each other, because, as supply is reduced price often rises to a higher equilibrium level. ‘Assuming that an equilibrium situation existed in the first place, the two courses of action lead to the same result. The oil-exporting countries have, in practice, followed both courses, producing a reinforcement effect between the two demarketing mix elements’ (Saddik, 1977:282).

Product and promotion activities can be similarly reinforcing of each other.

Product: In this context, demarketing also involves seeking alternative substitute products to oil and gas that can meet consumers’ long-term future energy needs.

Promotion: When promoting as part of a demarketing mix, it is recognised that the main objective of marketing communications changes. In the case of oil-exporting countries, their communication imperatives were: To convince their customer nations that their demarketing strategies were appropriate and were not simply designed to hold their customer nations to ransom over prices and export levels; to encourage customers to switch to alternative energy products; and also to attract innovative responses through technology and knowledge to develop alternative energy solutions.

Saddik also noted that other demarketing activities such as ‘stricter credit terms, a decreasing level of customer services and abolition of discount policies are not uncommon in the oil market of today’ (1977:283).

When demarketing occurs, it is therefore evident that traditional marketing activities are used, ‘but in reverse: for example, the marketing mix variables are adjusted to “cool” demand’ (Sodhi, 2011:181).

Demarketing is also used in the not-for-profit and public sectors, ‘to curb consumption or injurious consumption and the task of the marketer is to promote deconsumption of a product/behavior’ (Sodhi, 2011:181), particularly ‘where environmental impacts are most severe’ (Wall, 2007:123). O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2002:544) identify the existence of organisations committed to reducing consumer demand through demarketing activities, for example, ‘in the USA, the organization called “Buy Nothing Day” (BND) argues that over-consumption is wrecking the environment and dragging down the quality of life’. However, when marketing is employed in the public and not-for-profit sectors, whether or not the objective is to influence behaviour that involves, *decreasing demand*, for example curbing the consumption of alcohol or cigarettes, or *increasing demand*, for example by encouraging increased participation in physical activity, such marketing activities are more usually all defined as ‘social marketing’. No distinction tends to be made for those marketing activities designed to curb consumption that would, otherwise, be defined as ‘demarketing’. This is evident in the following definition of social marketing as ‘the adaption of commercial marketing techniques to programmes designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of society of which they are part’

(Andreasen, 1994:110), a definition that focuses only on the voluntary behaviour change, and not on whether that change involves increasing or decreasing attendant consumption.

The term ‘counter-marketing’ can also applied when the aim of the demarketing activities is not just to shrink the level of total demand, as indicated by Kotler and Levy, but to stop consumption completely of, for example, tobacco-related products (Farrelly *et al.,* 2002). However, more recently, Kotler has called for a more proactive approach to all marketing activities for sustainability, in order to ‘demarket/countermarket certain products, technologies, and marginal consumer segments (e.g., consumers who cannot afford expensive homes)’ (Achrol and Kotler, 2012:45), concluding that a ‘new consumption philosophy of customer care’ can mean ‘demarketing and countermarketing as often as it means marketing’ (*ibid* p50). In this article, the authors do not articulate any distinction between ‘demarketing’ and ‘counter-marketing’. Moreover, the example they give of demarketing or counter-marketing to marginal consumer segments could seem to be more related to *selective* demarketing, the objective of which, according to Kotler and Levy’s earlier paper is to ‘discourage the demand coming from certain customer classes’ (1971:75), rather than *general* demarketing which aims to reduce total overall demand.

Organisational Demarketing for Temporary Shortages

Webster (1992:15) proposed that marketing, which should remain ‘focused on the ever-changing customer in the global marketplace’ has three different strategic roles within organisations, affecting: The corporation as a whole; one of the corporation’s businesses; or its Strategic Business Units (SBU). It is more difficult to perceive of an occasion where an entire corporation would actively choose to decrease total demand through general demarketing than viewing demarketing as a strategic approach to be pursued at the level of a corporation's individual business or SBU.

Kotler and Levy's (1971) article identified the following cases where general demarketing could be seen to be at the level of the corporation when facing temporary shortages in supply that was unable to keep up with customer demand at the early growth stage of the product lifecycle when new products were introduced into the market in the 1960s. These included Eastman Kodak when it introduced its new Instamatic camera; Wilkinson Sword's new stainless steel blade; and Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser beer. However, in each of these cases, demand-reduction was only sought for a particular product, and not for the corporation's overall output.

The other example provided by Kotler and Levy, that of savings and loan associations that 'faced an oversupply of savings relative to their ability to invest the funds and sought means to discourage the savings customers. They were willing to encourage small accounts, but refused large depositors' (1971:75). However, while classified as *general* demarketing in that article, it could be seen that this provides a better example of *selective* demarketing, as the activities were aimed at a particular segment of customers – large-deposit savers.

One example can be found in the extant literature of general demarketing to deal with a temporary shortage at the corporate level has been provided by Arlbjørn and Lüthje (2012) who explore the case of a global manufacturing organisation headquartered in one country where product development also takes place, with its manufacturing taking place in 4 countries on 2 continents, and customers based in more than 130 countries around the world.

In this case general demarketing at a corporate level was required due to problems in the corporation's supply chain:

> 'inadequate inventory management went beyond the deliveries to the customers because the company could not keep up with the demand for some of its products. For other products, the company had too many on inventory that became obsolete' (*ibid* p1058).

Kotler and Levy (1971:76-77) identify a wide range of demarketing activities that can be appropriately employed by a company facing temporary shortages in supply in order to encourage deconsuming through demand reduction. These can also be mapped against the different elements of the demarketing mix:

Product 'Reduce product quality or content, either to encourage deconsuming or to make more of the product available and thus demarket at a slower rate'.

Place 'Curtail the number of distribution outlets, using the product shortage as an opportunity to eliminate undesirable dealers and/or customers'. Kotler and Levy also suggest a range of distribution strategies that allocate products either on the basis of:

- *First-come, first-served*, which is usually deemed by existing customers to be a fair method of allocating supplies, but which can be deemed unfair by new customers.
- *Proportional demand*, which means allocating a decided proportion of each customer's overall order. While this can also be seen as a fair and equitable solution, it will leave some customers without enough supply to meet their needs. This may lead to the customer organisation being unable

to meet its own consumer's demand, requiring similar demarketing activities to be undertaken throughout the entire supply chain, or to some customers seeking alternative suppliers to which they may then become loyal at the expense of their original supplier.

- *Favoured customers*, where the customers deemed by the supplying company to be more valuable will get their orders filled, but, due to demand exceeding supply, other customers will end up with either no or a limited supply of its required products.
- *Highest bid*, where 'the supply goes to those customers who offer the highest premium for early delivery. While many people consider this an exploitative strategy, economists typically argue that it makes the most sense since the product flows to those who presumably need it most'.

However, Kotler and Levy note do that each one of these approaches will lead to some customer being disappointed. When utilising such allocation strategies to deal with temporary shortages, they warn that 'if the company seeks to maximize its long-run, rather than shortrun profits, it should choose solutions that minimize the total disappointment of customers during the period in question'.

Price When attempting to discourage demand through pricing mechanisms when demarketing, it is most usual to see product costs rising, although other costs can be raised, including the psychological costs of 'the time and expense necessary for the buyer to procure the product or service'.

Promotion Kotler and Levy identify a range of promotional demarketing mix activities that can be employed to curtail demand, including: Reducing advertising expenditure; modifying the message content; reduce other promotional activities including all forms of sales promotions; and to 'cut back salesmen's selling time on the product and their entertainment budgets, asking them to concentrate on other products, spend more time in service and intelligence work/ and learn to say *no* in a way that customers find acceptable'.

Kotler and Levy do, however, warn that such activities must not be undertaken in isolation, but rather, it must be seen that all demarketing mix activities should work together, reinforcing each other, with an attendant marketing eye being kept on 'the elasticity and cross-elasticities of the different instruments, i.e., their impact on demand when employed with varying intensity, both individually and in combination. Otherwise, the demarketing program may overinhibit demand, and the company may find itself facing a shortage of customers' (1971:76). However, while Kotler and Levy identify these strategies as being appropriate to deal with times of temporary shortages, it can be seen that many of these demarketing activities could also be employed to deal with more general chronic overpopularity of products and services.

Organisational Demarketing for Chronic Overpopularity

With regard to general demarketing being required to deal not with temporary shortages, but to deal instead with what Kotler and Levy refer to as 'chronic overpopularity' (1971:77), the examples they give are all from the service sector. The first is a tourism marketing issue. It is interesting to compare this example of general demarketing with other issues relating to reducing demand relating to the consumption of places in the chapter in this book on synchromarketing. Kotler and Levy identify two cases where general demarketing of places has been undertaken due to overpopularity.

Bali

> 'The island of Bali in the South Pacific has long been a tourist's dream. In recent years, it has attracted a larger number of tourists than can be handled comfortably with its facilities. The island is in danger of becoming overcrowded and spoiled'.

Oregon

> 'Because of fear that the area's natural beauty will be spoiled by congestion, officials in the state of Oregon are demarketing to prospective settlers'.

The third example offered by Kotler and Levy concerns a popular London restaurant. Although the restaurant is fully booked for months in advance, 'tourists without reservations crowd around in the hope of cancellations. They add noise and detract from the intended atmosphere of leisurely dining'.

Bali's demarketing strategy 'is to reduce the island's attractiveness to middle-income tourists while maintaining or increasing its appeal to high-income tourists'. Oregon 'does promote tourist trade; the governor encourages people to visit so long as they do not stay'. However, given that each of these cases describes places where only certain segments of consumers are actively not wanted, it could be seen that these places are practising *selective* rather than *general* demarketing. The London restaurant can be seen to have practiced general demarketing to reduce overall total demand. 'They added a doorman who discouraged people from waiting for cancellations and from phoning about the availability of reservations. They also raised the prices'.

Heritage tourism demarketing

Examples of general demarketing through raising prices, and / or limiting access, can often be seen in tourism marketing (Medway *et al*., 2011), particularly when considering the preservation of heritage in a tourism context. Globalisation has already been mentioned as one of the challenges facing marketers that can lead to a focus on demarketing activities, due to either, unequal demand being spread across a corporation's global markets requiring some form of overall general demarketing, or where a company's global operations may cause temporary problems in their supply chain requiring some form of temporary demarketing to facilitate better inventory management. In the context of the preservation of cultural heritage and the service sector in which that operates, globalisation, with its attendant potential for cultural convergence, has led to the resurgence of interest in 'all things local', and that it is a political, rather than organisational imperative that drives the protection of cultural traditions not only to gain the benefits of differentiating one place from another, but also to preserve heritage for future generations (Arantes, 2007:291). Consumption of cultural heritage when involving visits to actual sites can be compared to the earlier example given of the oil and gas industry, where, similarly, the very act of consumption is what leads to the erosion, destruction or even eventual extinction of the very 'product' that is consumed. As a result, it is recognised that the tourism industry can not only 'generate serious preservation problems … it can also contribute to the enhancement and protection' of the sites visited (Marcotte and Bourdeau, 2012:80). Of particular interest to scholars has been the labeling of certain 'unique natural and cultural sites' as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites (WHS). Because it seems that, in some cases, to be recognised as a WHS is one factor that in itself can generate increased tourism to a particular site:

'Including the sites on a list recognizing their unique character raises their destination

> appeal and popularity. Perversely total protection of these sites would imply not making them known to the broader traveling public. In fact some particularly ecologically or socially sensitive heritage sites are subject to a "demarketing" approach to reduce the number of visitors' (Marcotte and Bourdeau, 2012:82).

Therefore, effective site management has become an important imperative, and, since 1997, 'submission of a management plan became a prerequisite for inscription as a World Heritage Site and all sites inscribed before then were required to prepare and submit a management plan by 2005' (Wilson and Boyle, 2006:504). However, it is also recognised that, unlike demarketing when practiced by a company in the private sector, when the decision taken to demarket can usually be taken solely by the company, when considering WHS, their management, particularly for sustainable tourism objectives can involve a wide range and type of both public, private and not-for-profit organisations. A full list of 'organization types cited in implementation of sustainable tourism objectives' of UK WHS includes (*ibid* p508):

- Advisory bodies
- Community associations
- Conservation trusts
- Education bodies
- Government departments
- Government funded body/agency
- Local authorities
- Partnerships
- Private landowners
- Private organizations/operators

- Site managers
- Steering group
- Tourist boards
- Transport organizations

It is therefore important that in these cases, demarketing must be a collaborative inter-organisational activity. One example given by Wilson and Boyle of a UK WHS where high levels of collaboration are evidenced in the management plans of the site is Stonehenge, considered a 'potent and iconic symbol of England's heritage' (2006:511). In the case of Stonehenge, Anderton (2011:149) traces the chronic overpopularity of the site to the Stonehenge Free Festival that was first held in 1974. This festival attracted 'tens of thousands of revellers to its month-long summer solstice celebrations. It had become the pre-eminent meeting place and spiritual focal point for an increasing number of New Age Travellers'. The government at the time supported the police action undertaken in 1985 to stop the event from taking place at all, ultimately leading to 'amendments to the Public Order Act 1986 ... The measures and restrictions that it imposed largely crushed the Free Festival movement and the travelling community which had sustained it'. Although 'within the UK there is extensive legislation for site protection ... To this end there is usually a key government agency that has ownership, conservation and management responsibility for the site (Wilson and Boyle, 2006:503), such heavy-handed techniques as were applied to conserve Stonehenge during the 1980s are not always evident in the demarketing of specific places.

Indeed, in addition to those strategies already identified of restricting access and employing price mechanisms, Medway *et al.* (2011) identify other demarketing practices that can be applied to places, these include: No marketing – either at all, or at certain times of year;

Diverson demarketing - involving redirection of consumers to alternative places ; and Informational demarketing – 'an example of this would be the way that various national governments provide ongoing advice to their citizens about which locations they should not travel to' (2011:128).

Medway *et al.* also make the distinction between active demarketing and passive demarketing. Active demarketing would involve actively managing the demarketing mix of *place* (through restricting access), *price* (employing price mechanisms that usually involves riainsg prices in order to decrease demand) *promotion* (including informational demarketing) and *product* (through diversion demarketing). The strategy of no marketing can be seen to be general passive demarketing. Medway *et al*. (2011:127) also identify a strategy of selective passive demarketing that can also be followed:

> 'By emphasising certain place attributes to market a location to certain types of individuals or organisations, it may automatically follow that other elements that may attract alternative types of individuals or organisations are de facto demarketed'.

Conceptually, however, it is difficult to see how passive selective *demarketing* differs in any way from what we would otherwise know as the *marketing* strategy where any organisation of any size in any sector is simply selecting segments to serve that it believes it can serve not only well, but also better than competitors, in order to achieve its market potential.

<u>Organisational Demarketing for Product Elimination</u>

Some companies may need to undertake general demarketing because the introduction of new legislation would no longer allow a company to sell a particular product or service, or because it has either chosen to eliminate a particular product or service from its portfolio due to, for example, decreased customer demand and / or because the company is introducing a new product or service to replace an existing one. In all these cases, overall total demand needs to be directed to a new alternative product offering. However, in many cases, loyal customers already exist for the current product that is to be eliminated. In such cases, the company's task also therefore involves ensuring their demarketing activities do not 'create customer ill will' (Kotler and Levy, 1971:77).

Similar to the issues raised above relating to the oil and gas industry, facing the need to find alternative energy products to replace the planet's finite natural resources upon which we currently rely, in product elimination cases demarketing activities must be focused on:

> 'Informing the customer as to why the product is being dropped, offering partial or full compensation to important customers who are hurt by the disappearance of the product, and maintaining a minimal stock of the product to satisfy the hard-core customers' (Kotler and Levy, 1971:78).

Conclusion

This chapter started by considering various perspectives on the purpose of marketing, particularly from a demand-generation perspective. Although also practiced when an organisation faces temporary shortages in supply that is unable to meet its level of customer demand, general demarketing activities are also often driven by the recognition of resource scarcity and other environmental concerns. According to Sodhi (2011:177), the latter requires 'the development of a marketing orientation specific to this new marketing environment ... This concept maintains that the marketer's task is to shape demand to conform to long-term objectives rather than blindly engineer increases in sales without regard to such objectives- sustainability in the present day context being one such objective' (Sodhi, 2011:177), further recognising that ‘the consumer is also more accepting of demarketing efforts and is now willing to play along. The consumer understands his responsibility in co-creation of the environment, is willing to consume responsibly and make the sacrifices both in terms of behavior change and paying extra prices for longevity of the planet. (*ibid* p183).

Indeed, this reflects the conclusion of Kotler and Levy’s (1971) original article proposing the concept of demarketing. Indeed, they recognise that marketing as an activity should be undertaken to ‘regulate the level and shape of demand so that it conforms to the organization's current supply situation and to its long-run objectives’ (p80). From this perspective, the entire proposition of a concept such as ‘demarketing’ can be seen to be merely a contentious way of these leading authors illustrating their view of marketing rather than simply as an activity that is designed to generate demand, instead as one that can affect demand either by increasing *or* decreasing it. However, this does point to the importance of the marketer’s effective understanding of the market itself. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, if firms are undertaking activities to *meet* customer demand then there should be no need for general demarketing at all.

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