A PURCHASING PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNIVERSAL MARKETING FUNCTIONS

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Economic exchange is a fundamental and necessary activity within any society. In order for an economic exchange to occur, the universal marketing activities must be performed by participants in the exchange process. Traditionally, our literature has focused attention on the role of the seller. This paper, however, presents a discussion of how buyers fully participate in the exchange process by actively performing the universal marketing functions. In the past, many purchasing professionals have not recognized their involvement in these so-called "marketing" activities and this may have constrained the effectiveness of some purchasing organizations. By understanding what the functions are, by acknowledging that both parties in the exchange process are involved, and by developing skills within these domains, purchasing professionals can improve their effectiveness and efficiency within the market place.

INTRODUCTION

An important approach to the study of economic exchange is an examination of participant performance of the universal marketing functions. Even though it has long been recognized that any economic exchange involves at least two parties, marketing has usually been perceived as an activity done by sellers attempting to generate sales and achieve profits in the marketplace. Consequently, marketing has usually been studied from the seller's perspective. It is important to recognize, however, that in many ways, the act of buying a product also requires the effective performance of analogous marketing activities. This is particularly true given that marketing has adapted from a transactional perspective to a more relational paradigm (Dwyer et al. 1986).

The current collaborative view has placed even greater importance on examining the role of both parties in the exchange. For example, there have been recent calls within the services marketing literature for the engagement of customers in the development and creation of products. This has been proposed as a way to enhance the value of the product/service in the exchange (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Rokkan et al. 2003). In this context, customers are actively engaged in terms of aiding the selling firm in identifying and creating products/services that best meet customer needs. In this sense, the customer must be able to "market" to the selling firm in order to achieve incorporation of the customer's ideas into the product/service being co-created.

This engagement of consumers can be generalized to organizational buyers within a business-to-business setting. Here, buyers must be able to "market" the needs and wants of their firm to industrial salespeople in order to be assured that the demands of the buying firm are adequately met. Research has shown, for example, that a distributor's (i.e., a buyer's) market-oriented behaviors towards a supplier can significantly impact the supplier's perception of trust, commitment, cooperative norms, and satisfaction (Baker et al. 1999).

Many years ago, Kotler and Levy (1973) most appropriately pointed out "Buying is

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Marketing, Too!" Other authors have addressed this issue in other ways (e.g., Cravens and Hoffman 1977; Enis and Smith 1980; Lambert and Allen 1976; Kiser 1969; Kiser 1976), but to our knowledge there has not been a recent systematic analysis of buyer performance of the universal marketing functions. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to document and describe the ways in which buyers perform these universally agreed upon marketing functions or activities that occur whenever an economic exchange takes place.

THE UNIVERSAL MARKETING FUNCTIONS

A "functional" approach is one of the many ways to study marketing and involves examining the activities or functions of exchange participants with the objective of improving the accomplishment of these tasks. While much attention has been directed towards the development of an idealized listing of the marketing functions (Jones 1943; McGarry 1950; McGarry 1951; Ryan 1935; Shaw 1912; Westerfield 1915), the framework utilised by Beckman and Davidson (1962) has much to offer. These highly respected scholars proposed that the universal marketing functions are major economic activities. These functions are inherent in the marketing process, pervade it, and through a continuous division of labor tend to become specialized. Beckman and Davidson (1962, p. 41) provided a list of eight separate marketing activities, subdivided into three major categories: Functions of Exchange, Functions of Supply or Physical Distribution, and Facilitating Functions. A complete enumeration of the Universal Marketing Functions is shown in Exhibit 1.

The universal marketing functions must be performed whenever an economic exchange occurs. The seller and/or the buyer may be responsible for any particular activity. In many cases the responsibilities are shared across the participants. This often leads to a discussion of the "shift-ability" of the responsibility for performing any of the particular marketing functions. Any consideration of the shift-ability of the functions would necessarily note the buyer's role in the process. Johanson (2004) recently provided an interesting perspective on this issue as it relates to the development of a market based economy in Russia.

As stated earlier, however, most of the literature has been dominated by discussions of the seller's role. What follows here is an examination of the buyer's participation in this process.

EXHIBIT 1
Universal Marketing Functions*

I. Function of Exchange
- Buying
- Selling

II. Function of Supply or Physical Distribution
- Transporting
- Storing

III. Facilitating Functions
- Standardization and Grading
- Risk bearing
- Financing
- Marketing Information

* Source: Beckman, T.N. and W.R. Davidson (1962), *Marketing* (Seventh Edition), New York: The Ronald Press Company, 41.

FUNCTIONS OF EXCHANGE

Buying

Buyers, quite obviously, are very much involved in the performance of the buying function. Buying includes: selecting a source of supply, selecting particular products, determining the quantity of products to be secured, and scheduling these purchases. The building of an assortment is an important element of the buying function. The actual negotiation with vendors is also considered part of the buyer's role in this buying function and experts predict an increased focus on collaborative win-win negotiation strategy (Carter et al. 2000).

Selling

The manner in which buyers perform the selling function is not, however, so obvious. Nevertheless, buyers do perform selling functions. For example, maintaining satisfactory relations with vendors has always been considered an important role for an organization's buyers. A buyer has much to gain from the simplicity of continuing to buy from the same source, as compared to the relative complexity of dealing with a new seller. Furthermore, cumulative quantity discounts and other loyalty programs provide incentives for the continuation of supply from the current vendor, indeed encouraging inertia rather than the search for alternative providers.
Beyond inertia, there is much to be gained from a partnering type of relationship with sellers. Just as some sellers have adopted relationship selling as a fundamental paradigm, some executives from the other side of the exchange have actively worked toward developing similarly useful relationships (Stjernström and Bengtsson 2004). Indeed, supply chain management was recently defined as "these attempts to integrate and partner with suppliers and to integrate logistics functions and transportation providers to efficiently manage the value chain" (Wisner and Tan 2000, p. 34). Given the fact that at least some sellers need to be persuaded to adopt the partnering paradigm, purchasing executives have been required to use influence strategies and other selling efforts to convince vendors of the merits of the partnering concept. Carter et al. (2000) recently predicted an even greater focus on the use of relationship management activities by purchasing executives given increased global competitiveness and limited resources.

Another way buying organizations may be able to sell a supplier on engaging in a long-term relationship is to encourage seller investment in transaction specific assets (Heide and John 1988). It has generally been assumed that investing in transaction specific assets provides an opportunity for the non-investing firm to exploit the investing firm. Rokkan et al. (2003), however, found that investments in transaction specific assets can actually bond the buyer and seller closer together if those transaction specific assets result in above normal returns to the non-investing partner.

Becoming a "preferred" customer offers the buyer even more benefits (Brokaw and Davisson 1978; Stundza 2000). A buyer can become a preferred customer by making the seller aware of the merits of doing business with the buyer's organization. Similarly, in some extremely short-supply market situations, characterized as the state of overdemand/ undersupply by Wynn and Campbell (1984), the seller may have to allocate the available supply among customers. When this is the case, the buyer will have to convince (sell) the seller on the advantages of supplying the buyer with adequate quantities of the product. Establishing long-term and preferential relationships with particular vendors may prove beneficial to the buyer during a *force majeure* such as that resulting from a tsunami or hurricane. When a *force majeure* occurs, suppliers could claim exemption from contractual delivery obligations "based on war, natural disasters, or 'other acts of God'" (Prema and Studnza 2005), but are likely to first allocate available supply to preferred customers.

Buyers are often charged by higher management with the responsibility of developing additional, alternative, or simply new sources of supply, perhaps for a new task type of purchase or simply as a way to improve economic performance. In order to achieve this goal, the buyer must engage in an activity similar to what sellers call prospecting. The buyer must communicate interest in the market to vendors and sell his or her firm as an outlet for the seller's product. This may involve the issuance of Requests for Proposals, or other announcements and advertisements in publications, direct contact with vendors, or other forms of marketing communications and promotions. The practice of market segmentation by buyers can greatly facilitate the buyer's accomplishment of these tasks (Kiser 1969).

Buyers also make use of selling skills in negotiating prices, in securing adjustments on returned goods, or when trading in used equipment. A buyer must present the same type of persuasive arguments to further the buyer's interest that the seller presents to advance the seller's interest.

The use of reciprocal trade agreements could also be considered to be a selling function that is performed by buyers. Indeed, a buyer might present an even more persuasive argument when needed products are in short supply. In this case the agreement might be: "we will **sell** to you, if you will **sell** to us," instead of the more traditional, "we will *buy* from you, if you will *buy* from us."

An Additional Consideration

Thus, buyers perform both of the functions of exchange – both buying and selling. It is interesting to note that sellers also perform **both** functions of exchange: they sell and buy. The traditional selling function has, of course, always been considered as a major activity of the seller. But in recent times, as salespeople have adopted the relationship paradigm there has been more involvement with assisting the buyer in the performance of the buying function. As the professionalism of the modern sales force continues (Hawes, Rich and Widmier 2004), more and more of the salesperson's time will be spent in assisting the buyer in making selections, in suggesting an inventory or assortment, in counseling the buyer on what product or service would best suit the buyer's needs, or in generally consulting on the buying issues faced by the trusted business partner.

Of course, when a seller accepts a trade-in as part of an exchange, the seller is buying as well as selling. Another instance of the seller performing a buying function is demonstrated by considering the fact that each member up the supply channel acts as a type of "purchasing agent," or at least as a potential gatekeeper for customers down the supply chain. A seller assembles and offers customers an assortment of products from which to choose, and only those products which the seller has available can be offered to customers. Therefore, the seller, in the performance of the buying function, effectively screens out many products (and/or brands) from which customers could choose. In addition, during times of extremely short supply, sellers may help trusted buyers secure goods and services from an alternative source. Exhibit 2 summarizes this discussion of how both buyers and sellers perform each of the functions of exchange normally associated with the other participant.

FUNCTIONS OF SUPPLY OR PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION

Transporting

Buyers often engage in the performance of the transport function. For example, some buyers send their trucks to the seller's place of business to pick up and then deliver products. Also, any time the product is shipped F.O.B. Seller, the buyer is at least paying for, if not also arranging for, the transport of goods.

In addition, buyers perform the transport function when they monitor and direct incoming traffic. At large warehouse distribution centers, this is an important activity. Furthermore, the buyer often must transport goods within the physical confines of the place of business. Materials handling does not end when goods are delivered to the loading dock.

Another important transporting function involves the important act of following up on late deliveries. When goods don't arrive (from sellers) on schedule, it is often necessary for the

EXHIBIT 2
Selected Examples of the Function of Exchange

Participant	Buying Activities	Selling Activities
Buyer	• Traditional buying activities	• Maintaining satisfactory relations with vendors • Becoming a preferred customer • Securing supply during shortages • Maintaining continuity of supply • Developing additional or alternative sources of supply • Negotiating prices or adjustments • Reciprocal agreements during short supply
Seller	• "Professional" selling by assisting the buyer make selections • Securing alternative supply for buyer when unable to deliver from own inventory • Accepting "trade-ins" • Acting as "purchasing agent for members down the channel"	• Traditional selling activities

buyer to determine the cause and take appropriate action to obtain the timely delivery of the product. Indeed, the term "expeditor" was created to describe this aspect of the transporting function among buyers (Causey 1989).

Storing

Buyers have traditionally been active in the performance of the storing function. This is one function that marketing scholars have frequently discussed in terms of its shift-ability from sellers to buyer and vice versa. For example, some discounts (e.g., seasonal and quantity) offered by sellers are designed to encourage buyers to take early delivery of the goods. This results in the buyer, rather than the seller, performing the storing function in the interim period until the goods are needed.

Buyers must also be concerned with maintaining adequate inventory control, an activity undertaken by buyers to assist in maintaining appropriate stock levels. The existence of at least a minimum level of stock is crucial to the continued successful operation of most firms. In some firms, a stock-out of certain materials could delay or shut down the firm's entire operation, but the buyer must attempt to balance this factor with the cost of carrying the inventory. The rate of inventory turnover is often an important factor greatly affecting a firm's overall rate of profit.

The storing function also includes physically maintaining inventory through store-keeping activities. This includes assuring proper environmental conditions and security for the inventory.

FACILITATING FUNCTIONS

Standardization and Grading

Standardization refers to the development of common (standard) levels of quality and/or quantity for products. The use of standards greatly facilitates the buying process (Avery 2005), and some buyers have developed formal standardization programs which they impose on sellers, often as an attempt to cut costs (Neil 2005; Van de Water 1968). The existence of standards can greatly increase the buyer's efficiency. Standardization of products makes it possible to reduce inventory levels and to simplify the entire production and distribution process.

Buyers sometimes carry the standardization function one step further by engaging the development of requests of proposals and engaging in specification buying (Gransberg and Molenaar 2004). In this case, the buyer explicitly details the desired nature for each component of the desired product of service. Hendrick (1971) has proposed that in addition to quality standards, buyers should also establish purchase price standards.

Grading is the act of comparing a phenomenon to a determined standard (Prema 2005). The selection of products to be purchased is perhaps the ultimate form of grading. The physical inspection of products prior to purchase, or upon delivery, is also grading activity. The verification of invoices upon receipt of goods is an additional necessary grading activity in that comparisons of performance to a standard are made.

Kiser (1969) has proposed that buyers should classify (segment) vendors. This process would be a grading activity. Similarly, the development of vendor ratings and other forms of vendor assessment, which are predicted to increase in usage (Carter et al. 2000), represents other types of grading activities.

Value analysis is a term which is often used to refer to another instance of the buyer's performance of the grading function. Value analysis consists of formal analytical procedures used to relate design and function of purchased products to their cost in an attempt to improve efficiency.

Risk Bearing

Buyers perform many risk-bearing functions which appear to be increasing in scope and extent (Harland et al. 2003). Any time products are purchased the buyer cannot be certain that he will obtain complete satisfaction. Supply risk is a complex, multi-faceted concept and includes risk sources as well as outcomes (Zsidisin 2003). Berens (1971) contended that even when products are supported by a strong guarantee, the buyer will still probably be less than content if the products don't perform as expected. Thus, risks are inherent in the purchase of goods, even when strong guarantees are provided. In addition, even if there are no problems with the mechanical performance of delivered goods, there is a risk that goods were purchased in less than optimal quantities, styles, colors, or combinations.

Buyers also bear risks in that sellers may not be able to specify an exact delivery date for the products purchased. This risk is compounded by the fact that some sellers use flexible pricing arrangements (Long and Varble 1973). Thus, the buyer may not know exactly when, or at exactly what price, the products will be delivered.

The buyer also bears the risk that the product he buys may lose value before it is sold or used. Tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, or fires may damage or destroy products held in inventory. The goods may be stolen. Physical deterioration can occur over time. Obsolescence may also occur through fashion change or technological innovations. General market conditions may also cause the value of the products to decline.

The buyer must always be involved with the balancing of risk. For example, when inventory levels are high, there is less risk of a costly stock-out. But on the other hand, there are risks involved in carrying inventory. The buyer attempts to strike a compromise between these two conflicting interests.

Financing

Buyers also perform financing functions. For example, the prepayment for products yet to be delivered represents buyer performance of the financing function. In some cases, cash payment at the time of receipt of goods could be considered a financing function performed by the buyer, especially if the seller had traditionally extended credit.

The holding of inventory is also a buyer-oriented financing function. The inventory represents an investment which must be financed by some entity. The buyer would be even more involved in the financing function of inventory if large quantities of goods were purchased in order to secure quantity discounts. In this instance, the seller may have shifted both the storing and financing function forward to the buyer.

The classic strategic question of whether to "make or buy" involves the use of financial analysis techniques. Perhaps the performance of this analysis technique might also be considered, in a broad sense, a financing function of the buyer.

Marketing Information

Buyers perform many marketing information functions. For example, most buying organizations may maintain a list of acceptable suppliers for straight rebuy items. Buyers often keep a file on vendor's prices and performance over a period of time. In addition, records of purchases, prices paid, terms of sale, expected delivery dates, stock levels, product specification lists, and vendor catalogues of products and prices are evidence of performance of the marketing information function. In fact, the issuance of a purchase order could even be considered a marketing information function. Most buying organizations are responsible for providing periodic reports to management. This, too, is an example of the buyer performance of the market information function.

Buyers who are responsible for performing research tasks are a part of the overall marketing information system. Market studies, materials studies, and cost analyses require buyers to search out and investigate potential sources of supply. In addition, buyers are often involved in preparing cost estimates for made-to-order products which their company manufactures. Buyers perform many general research functions to keep informed of market conditions. Their search for potential suppliers is a never-ending task and would be considered a search for marketing information.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated that buyers engage in the universal marketing functions. Rather than simply being the recipient of seller actions in the marketing process, buyers also fully participate in the conduct of the marketing activities. If, as suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004), marketing is shifting from a goods-based perceptive to a more services-based one, this is something that should become even more necessary in the years ahead. Furthermore, the well documented shift from a transactional to a relational perspective places responsibility on both sides of the dyad to engage in marketing activities. Using a framework developed by Beckman and Davidson (1962), examples have been provided of how buyers engage in these marketing oriented behaviors.

Given the increasing pressures by consumers to enhance value by lowering or holding costs at current levels, it would appear that there will be even greater need for buyers to engage in marketing activities directed towards sellers in the future. These marketing activities would, in part, communicate to the selling organization the need that the purchasing organization has to serve their customers. By utilizing traditional down-stream marketing tactics in an up-stream relationship, buyer organizations should be able to achieve the goals of serving their customers while maintaining optimal working relationships with their suppliers.

Several implications evolve from this analysis. First, the role of purchasing will become even more important when it is more widely recognized that buyers also perform the universal marketing functions. Purchasing executives can and should become more proactive participants within the supply chain. Secondly, purchasing executives can and should work in greater harmony with selling executives to improve the economic performance of the supply chain. Beyond the notion of a collaborative partnership, this paper has shown that both parties have more in common than was perhaps earlier realized. Thirdly, purchasing professionals need to have an understanding of sales and marketing strategy as well as tactics. This can be achieved by changes in recruitment, through additional training, or as a result of various cross functional assignments within the firm.

It is our hope that this paper might open a dialogue relative to the way in which buyers engage in marketing activities directed towards suppliers. There would appear to be a number of interesting questions to be investigated including, but not limited to, the following.

- Which marketing tactics work best in dealing with up-stream partners?
- To what extent can marketing activities undertaken by purchasing organizations enhance both supplier and purchasing organization performance?
- Do marketing activities undertaken by purchasing organizations enhance the relationship with the selling organization?

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