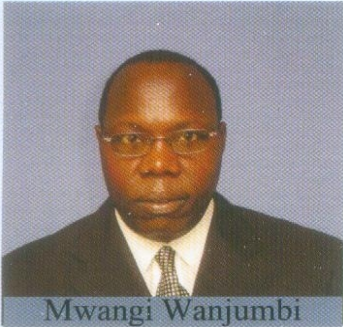


Marketers Figure Phobia



Mwangi Wanjumbi

It was aptly put by Patricia Ithau, the Marketing Director of East Africa Breweries. "Marketing is a science that delivers organizational results. Promotion activities should however be done responsibly for the benefit of the society."

This was at the Grand Regency Hotel where she was the guest at the 2008 second Marketers' Night. But then, are the deliverables not measurable figures in terms of eventual profits and so on? And how is this delivery of results effectively carried out by professionals who largely suffer from figure phobia?

These questions were what immediately came to me after listening to Ithau's powerful presentation. And to avoid shying shielding my concerns I shared with the participants at question time. In response, the unbelieving guest sought to know from the floor whether this could be a myth or actually factual. Even though there were varying reactions by the marketers present, it was seemingly evident from the majority that this figure phobia was actually not a myth but a reality.

Incidentally, the issue had not been raised out of the blue. I am personally initially an accountant who later developed passionate interests in marketing to the extent of becoming a trainer on the same. Perhaps my exposure in both fields led to my being naturally selected as a lecturer

in Financial Awareness for Marketers when the course was introduced by the Marketing Society of Kenya (MSK), in its training programs, sometimes in 2007. Training was even made easier by virtue of understanding the two disciplines not only theoretically but also practically. But what could have come out of experiences in the financial awareness training?

In fact, it was unbelievable. The initial instructions were actually to take the marketers through the practical applications of the financial accounting basics only. "Marketers are interested in sales figures and quantities only. Help them to know the things that affect what they do directly such as imprests, advances and so on. Please don't bog their minds with intricate financial details like profit and loss accounts and so on. You could actually lose their attention making the course a non-starter," warned the course moderator, himself a marketer.

The guideposts had evidently been set. The attitude was clear. One wonders however, how it is possible for marketers to go through a 4 year degree program without encountering

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rigorous figure oriented courses that would prepare them for a figure-work demanding future. Why would a large majority of marketers actually shun figures so explicitly as expressed by this moderator and, also as witnessed at the Marketers' Night?

There is hope nevertheless. Since the introduction of financial awareness for marketer's course in the MSK programs, where I was Involved, it appears that marketers are now coming to terms with figure work after all. Clearly, every business activity we engage in ultimately has direct financial implications, even though they may not look obvious. Efficiency in productive activities certainly results to improved bottom line, whereas vices like lateness to work and failure to meet deadlines results to loss of production time, which eventually translates negatively to overall organizational bottom-line.

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It is certainly not easy, but all is not lost though. But apparently, it looks like there is need to work with facilitators who understand both disciplines and especially the competing attitudes. This is seemingly the only way success will be achieved bringing the minds of the two to appreciate each others roles and skills. In fact, one of the greatest

combatants understand the tools used by each profession including why and when they are used.

Perhaps, a recent experience could demonstrate how to cure marketers from figure phobia. While recently taking marketers through the financial awareness course, I initially handled the basics of financial accounting. This included the concepts, the tools and so on, eventually graduating to the seemingly more complex attributes of accounting. The complex attributes include the budgeting process and funds flow statements, profit and loss and annual statements of accounts. The latter 3 are in fact the crux of accounting details for any organization irrespective of size. They are important financial details given that they actually indicate whether a company is likely to continue into the future and what the continuation portends. In our case, time could not allow coverage of the intricate calculations of arriving at these key figures.

Meanwhile, preparation of this requisite figure work is where the accountants excel especially aided by a baggage of jargon and techniques which end up confusing the marketer. But, inevitably, insights into the attitudes of the marketers and the accountants too could now be an additional tool which would be of great help towards training the two key professionals in any organization.

It was not surprising to actually be summoned by the marketers for an additional training session as a follow up of the first one. This time, it was a matter of demystifying how the accounting principles and theories are used to turn the day to day sales figures that the marketer is accustomed to, into measurable contributions to organizational performance. What is even more interesting is that the marketing students demanded this additional training themselves. A pleasant surprise in fact. And at short notice, I was luckily on hand to complete the exercise of imparting the technical aspects of the accounting skills to the then financial accounting skills hungry marketers. They were indeed keen to understand the intricate details of the financial accounting process.

It appears that with the right approach, animosity between

the accountant and the marketer could eventually be tamed especially from the marketers' perspective. In fact, even the Marketers' figure phobia as confirmed at the Marketers Night too, could eventually be tamed upon employment of the right training mechanism and tools.

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