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Pull Strategy

By Jack Miller

Some companies push. Some companies pull. Some companies try to do both.

Push means selling to your customers, and relying on them to sell (“push”) your products to the end users. Companies that sell store brands to retailers do this. Companies that sell raw materials to converters do this.

Pull means getting to your customers’ customers and establishing a preference for your brand, and getting them to “pull” your product through the channel. Companies with strong consumer brands do this; others can too.

The pull strategy certainly appears attractive: brand awareness and preference, higher margins, bigger market share. But of course, this comes at a cost, and may not always be the best strategy.

Certainly Coke and Pepsi, Budweiser and Coors, as well as other big brands have executed a pull strategy, but they have massive advertising budgets. But what if you sell paper to printers, or sell chemicals to manufacturers, or sell plastics or paperboard to packaging converters? Can you do a pull strategy? Should you do a pull strategy?

First, you need to answer a few questions. Do your customers’ customers care about your brand? Is there a perceived point of differentiation? Can you create a perceived point of differentiation? Can you create brand awareness and brand preference?

Somehow, your customers and their customers make purchase decisions. Do you know what they buy, why they buy it, and how they make the decisions? What value do they put on price, quality, and service? How do they define quality? What service do they need? What elements of quality and service are the “entry fee” and what elements can be points of differentiation? Do you know what it takes for them to change suppliers? When

is the last time they changed suppliers? Why did they do this? What process did they use to make this decision and the decision on which new supplier to choose?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you will know if you can successfully execute a pull strategy, and you will be able to formulate a strategy to do so.

Remember: if you want the rewards, you have to make the investment in doing your homework and then getting the execution right.

Market-Intell can help. Call Jack Miller at 203 925 0326 or email jack.miller@market-intell.com.

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