Alexander Repiev

“Physics envy” – physics abysmally misconstrued!

All things are subject to interpretation.
Whichever interpretation prevails at a given
time is a function of power and not truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche

I SWITCHED from physics to marketing in 1988, after
two decades of freelancing as a copywriter. I found
myself in the chair of marketing director at the Moscow
office of a Western blue-chip company. As is common
in physics, I plunged into the marketing literature abso-
lutely sure that I would acquire knowledge that would
enable me to handle singular marketing problems in the
then USSR. My naïveté came from the fact that nearly
any piece of knowledge in physics can immediately
be employed in the laboratory.

I was in for a shock – having devoured a dozen of
marketing tomes (Oh, God, how thick they appeared to
be – twice the size of an average physics book). I found
just a chaotic heap of useless, contradictory schemes,
visualizations, matrices, models, classifications, defini-
tions, dogmas, etc., etc., etc.

At first I honestly tried to apply some of that stuff
in my work, only to discover quite soon that it was of
no practical use whatsoever. And so, I had to progress
by trial and error. I pride myself in having nearly qua-
drupled the bottom line within 3.5 years.

You can imagine my surprise when years later I di-
covered that the infernal chaos in academic marketing
texts and minds is caused by the so-called “physics
envy,” a term coined by the British researcher Alan Tapp
[1]. That envy came from the desire of scholars in new
social university disciplines to establish their intellectual
credentials. Tapp called it “a form of mild paranoia.”

Tapp talks about physics’ “undue and malign influ-
ence within universities.” But the culprit is not physics
per se but rather academia’s abysmal misunderstanding
of the philosophy and practice of physical research, the
ways it uses mathematics, plans experiments, etc.

Having failed to internalize all this, marketing aca-
demics now practice thoughtless mimicry of the exter-
nal trappings of physics. They go overboard to make
academic marketing look scientific, but end up with
what the British marketer Andrew Ehrenberg chris-
tened “Scientification of Non-Knowledge” (SONK). It
is this mimicry and SONK-ing that are responsible for
the total disaster of academic marketing.

Tapp rightly maintains that “physics envy could
have a positive outcome.” But for that to occur, acad-
emia must take the trouble to embrace the true values
and approaches of physics.

Why do physicists account for a sizeable propor-
tion of Nobel laureates in non-physics disciplines? Be-
cause in a physics classroom people acquire a whole lot
of useful assets and habits, e.g., real scientific rigor in
definitions, models, techniques, and analysis, which
help them along enormously.

Says James Heckman, Nobel Laureate, Economics,
the beauty of experimental science and the pleasure of
matching theory to evidence. Although I later aban-
donned physics for economics, my enthusiasm for scien-
tific empirical work guided by theory was born in his
classroom.” In other words, when physicists abandon
physics, most of them continue to think and feel like
physicists and remain sticklers for physics-style rigor in
their reasoning or whatever.

Physics vs. academic marketing

I will try to look at some features of physics and
how they relate to those of academic marketing. After
that I will do the same for cliento-marketing.

Theory and practice

Physics is generally divided into fundamental and
applied branches. They are intertwined and linked with
practice. Edward Teller said: “The science of today is the technology of tomorrow.” Lay people are not interested in scientific detail; but they welcome the benefits they receive from discoveries of physicists. In 2007, the Nobel Prize in physics was awarded for the discovery of “giant magnetostriction.” Not many laymen understood that phenomenon. But everybody liked the net result – a dramatic increase in the capacity of electronic storage devices.

Engineering practitioners, especially in high technologies, are voracious readers of journals on fundamental and applied physics and other sciences. They search for ideas to be incorporated into new products.

**In academic marketing** – Practitioners ignore the results of academic “research.” Academic marketing journals are only read by library mice… and other academia [2], [3], [4].

### Honesty

Ludwig Feuerbach put it: “Love of science is love of truth; therefore honesty is the principal virtue of a scientist.” A dishonest scientist will sooner or later let himself go to garbles and lies, and find himself among pseudo-scientists. In his paper “Cargo Cult Science” [5] the Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman writes: “If you’re doing an experiment, you should report everything that you think might make it invalid… If you make a theory, you must also put down all the facts that disagree with it.”

Says Robert Ehrlich: “True scientist does not merely seek evidence for a hypothesis, but looks even harder for evidence against it. Moreover, they resort neither to tinkering with the theory (introducing a “fudge factor”) or making ad hoc adjustments to the data to get the two to match” [6].

A true scientist always doubts.

**In academic marketing** – SONK-ists are inherently dishonest. They have no boring habit to honestly cite cases that do not fit into their constructs, in blithe disregard of the fact that in marketing there are a multitude of mutually exclusive situations.

Sometimes they even condescend to outright lies. A mailing was sent to members of the Market Research Society of Australia asking them which techniques they (a) were aware of and (b) used. Along with Chi Square, multi-dimensional scaling, etc., the phantom “Scranton’s Capper” was inserted. Something like 30% of all researchers claimed to have heard of it and about 13% claimed to have used it.

Scientific dishonesty gives rise to academic hypocrisy – think one thing, say another. Peter November confides: “What I say to PhD students is: don’t rock the boat, comply with the paradigm. You will not get through if you try to be different” [2]. (Really, “Hypocrisy, Thy Name Is Academe” (Wendy McElroy) [7].) Post-Soviets are all too well acquainted with that. One of Soviet jokes – I do have my own opinion, but I disagree with it.

Not to be different means to think like everyone else. The US general George Patton said: “If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn’t thinking.”

What percentage of the academe are not thinking?

### Proofs, checks, and tests

Feynman goes on to say: “During the Middle Ages there were all kinds of crazy ideas. Then a method was discovered for separating the ideas – which was to try one to see if it worked, and if it didn’t work, to eliminate it. This method became organized into science.”

Thus, science owes its very birth precisely to trying, or rather to proving. Everything unproven is just a scientific hypothesis awaiting its proof; or an idle speculation, or an utter nonsense, or pseudo-science.

Physics is not interested in any results; it is only interested in faithful, hard-and-fast results. Some studies are re-tested many times over by different laboratories. In physics nobody would take you seriously unless you substantiate thoroughly your theoretical model with all its simplifications and assumptions. Nobody would publish your experimental findings unless you (a) show that your experiment was conducted extremely correctly and carefully, and (b) assess the experimental errors properly. In a paper, a busy physicist first goes for the rationale of the model and techniques employed. If unhappy with them, he may not read any further.

**In academic marketing** – One has to prove only one thing: a possibility to get extra profit due to a given idea. Alas, nearly nobody, nearly never proves this!

Many marketing “wisdoms” do not even stand a proof by an ancient method known as *reductio ad absurdum* (“reduction to the absurd”). Many marketing statements can be refuted by a simple mental or real
experiment with Clients.

His contempt for proving things the “scientist!” Philip Kotler justifies in a stunning manner: “I remember a remark of Paul Samuelson, my mentor: ‘It is difficult enough to develop theory than to take the time to prove it. That work can be done by others’. (!?)” [8]. But “others” are just happy with that unprovedness – nobody is going to question their papers and dissertations.

Logic

Real scientific reasoning is impossible without the strictest of logic.

In academic marketing – If members of exact sciences were to muddle through the tangle of academic texts, they would discover that nearly every paragraph of nearly any text contains some logical flaws.

Whole marketing books may rest on wrong precepts. For instance, Al Ries and Jack Trout begin their epoch-making opus “22 Immutable Laws of Marketing” by a fantastic logical inference: “There are laws of nature, so why shouldn’t there be laws of marketing?” (my review of that book [9].) Sure, in nature there are immutable laws. Well, but that in no way whatsoever suggests that there must be some rigorous laws in fields of human endeavor, such as management, philosophy, medicine, embroidery, cabinet making, ship building, accountancy, wheat growing, or… marketing! One obvious reason is that human beings are not especially susceptible to laws, even legal laws.

Bruce Marcus has so estimated Kotler’s logic [10]: “[The book] sees the subject in such distorted ways as to remind me of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire’s Candide. His concept of life included such dicta as, ‘Are noses not so wonderfully made to fit spectacles?’”

I suspect that many marketing professors, like Dr. Pangloss, are dead sure that the only raison d’être of marketing is for them to teach it to make their living.

Mathematics

Laymen, marketing academia included, believe that physics is just a kind of exercise in applied mathematics. By no means. Math for physicists is just a possible tool of gaining insights into Nature’s workings.

It is a suspicious tool. Some physicists cannot properly apply it and degenerate into “calculators.” They produce results devoid of physical meaning (“physicality”). Their math is generally of garbage-in, garbage-out (GIGO) nature. “Garbage-in” is an incorrectly constructed model (equations); some important factors overlooked; coefficients, parameters, etc., taken out of thin air; skewed stats, and so on. GIGO-types in physics have difficulty with “qualitative” problems, which require no math, such as these (by P. Kapitza) [11]:

- Explain why a person can run on very thin ice but cannot stand on it without falling through.
- How can an astronaut return to his spacecraft if the rope joining him to it accidentally breaks?

Many believe that the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb was Andrei Sakharov, a theoretical physicist well versed in mathematics. But the real creator of the concept of the bomb in 1950 was a sergeant Oleg Lavrentiev. He was of peasant stock; his unit was stationed at the Sakhalin [12]; he had just finished extramural high school. His mathematical proficiency was as good as nil, but his physical thinking was that of a genius.

The GIGO danger makes physicists wary about mathematics. Daniel Bernoulli went so far as to maintain: “It would be often better for the true physics if there were no mathematics in the world.” Albert Einstein regarded himself as a philosopher and disliked mathematics and numbers in general (he even did not remember the multiplication table). He said: “So far as the theories of mathematics are about reality, they are not certain; so far as they are certain, they are not about reality.” Number-crunchers should take heed of his words: “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

Strictly speaking, physics is no “exact science.” It is rather a fairly exact science, or approximately exact science, because physical experiments and calculations never yield absolutely exact results. Physicists prefer to use the words “estimation,” “approximation,” “error,” “to within an accuracy of.”

In academic marketing – Misuse and abuse of mathematics are largely responsible for the current state of the academe. Academics are mesmerized by fancy math. They try to make every publication “quantitative,” otherwise refereed journals will not accept them.

Even economists are worried about their work being mired in math scholasticism. Robert Heilbroner: “Mathematics has given economics rigor, but alas, also mortis.” Marketing academics have transferred that
Alexander Repiev, “‘Physics envy’ – physics abysmally misconstrued!”

rigor mortis to the vibrant craft of marketing.

Unlike economics and economo-marketing, client-to-marketing deals with people, or rather with their impressions and decisions. Attempts to work out, using formulas, or to measure, using quantitative research, anything involving people nearly always yield meaningless figures. But nobody minds. Even when confronted with pieces of “mathematics” like these [13]:

“The customer gets benefits and assumes costs, as shown in this equation:

\[
\text{Value} = \frac{\text{Benefits}}{\text{Costs}} = \frac{\text{(Functional benefits + emotional benefits)} \cdot \text{(Monetary costs + time costs + energy costs + psychic costs)}}{100}
\]

Based on this equation, the marketer can increase the value of the customer offering.”

Really? It boggles my mind just to think of what a poor company would do without that “equation”!

This is how, according to Kotler, a robot called Linda purchases a computer:

“Like most buyers (??), Linda is considering several attributes in her purchase decision, and she gives each a particular weight. She has assigned 40 percent of the importance to the computer’s memory capacity, 30 percent to its graphics capability, 20 percent to its size and weight, and 10 percent to its price (Linda must be a great computer expert!). To find Linda’s perceived value for each computer, we (??) multiply her weights by the scores indicating her beliefs about each computer’s attributes (\textit{Where do we get those funny scores from??}). So for computer \textit{A}, if she assigns a score of 10 for memory capacity, 8 for graphics capability, 6 for size and weight, and 4 for price, the overall score would be:

\[0.4 \times 10 + 0.3 \times 8 + 0.2 \times 6 + 0.1 \times 4 = 8\]

Calculating the scores (\textit{Who is to do that??}) for all of the other computers (??) that Linda is evaluating would show which one has the highest perceived value. This is critical, because a manufacturer who knows how buyers evaluate alternatives and form preferences can take steps to influence buyer decisions.”

That is all that the “farther of marketing” has to say about the most important and delicate issue in practical marketing – how a real-life person arrives at his buying decision. Congratulations!

And please, gentlemen, don’t ask our guru your irrelevant questions about how the marketer learns the percentages and scores; where our Linda gets her weights from, etc., etc. In a word, do not disturb the elegance of that scholastic discourse.

How about this piece of numbermania [14]:

 “… an empirically based mathematical model that ‘understands’ the connections between each of the market inputs and outputs in a category. With it you can say, ‘If we impact this target with this kind of positioning and with this level of advertising, we can expect to achieve this level of sales.’”

My goodness! I believe these sorcerers deserve a Nobel prize. Oddly enough, they appear to have never heard about a strong dependence of advertising efficiency on the content of the headline, copy, etc.

Information and pseudo-information

Physicists normally go for information that might suggest some meaningful inferences and decisions. Information that is collected for its own sake can be referred to as pseudo-information.

In academic marketing – There are reams of pseudo-informative data. Much of it is produced by irrelevant and absurd research. Here is a remarkable example – Table 15.2 “Alternative Measures of Awareness” from “Counter-Intuitive Marketing” by Kevin Clancy and Peter Krieg [14]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Awareness</th>
<th>Operational Definition for Booksellers Awareness (Both On-Line and Traditional Booksellers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First brand</td>
<td>“When you think of places where you can buy books, what is the first name that comes to mind?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaided brand</td>
<td>“What are all of the different booksellers and bookstores you can think of?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaided advertising</td>
<td>Which have you seen or heard advertising during the past 90 days?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven recall</td>
<td>“What do you remember seeing or hearing in the advertising for this company?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided advertising</td>
<td>“Have you seen any advertising for Amazon.com in the past 90 days?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially aided</td>
<td>“Which bookstore advertising advertises “All books, for all people, everywhere” (Slogan example)…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully aided</td>
<td>“Have you seen or heard any advertising for a tracer penetration Barnes &amp; Noble which uses the slogan…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided Brand</td>
<td>“I’m going to read you a list of booksellers. For each one I name, please tell me if you’ve ever heard of it. …”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This cumbersome, expensive “research” will yield a heap of motley, irrelevant “data,” which will then be squeezed into “a weighted composite measure.” What has that all to do with sales? – Nothing.

By the way, Amazon.com has not advertised for ages. The funny questions on the right will baffle many. One can first think of a bookstore round the corner, but it has never advertised. And so on and so forth.

But what has really much to do with sales is the question – how do people buy books nowadays? The modern reader often begins with the Internet. He receives there a lot of information about the book and makes his buying decision. He may then surf the Net for the lowest price and best delivery conditions.

**Domains of validity**

Everything is physics has its domain of validity. It is critically important to know those domains.

So, the atomic nucleus is described by a set of theories, each of which being valid for a given range of atomic numbers. Many laws (e.g., Ohm’s law, Hook’s law) are just convenient approximations: they only hold up to a certain limit. The breadth of validity domains varies. For instance, although, strictly speaking, the world is described by Einstein’s theories, and Newton’s physics is just a special case, it would be insane to employ Einstein’s equations to design machinery. In other words, Newton’s practical domain of validity is extremely wide.

By the way, contrary to popular belief, Einstein has not falsified or disproved Newtonian physics. He just came up with an exotic extension of it.

**In academic marketing** – When setting forth concepts and models, academics do not delineate their validity domains. Marketing texts are rife with facile statements that claim universality, although in fact they only refer to a specific situation and do not hold elsewhere. This is dangerous because an inexperienced reader may translate ideas that concern, say, cosmetics or beer to equipment, construction materials, etc.

Most texts are devoted to major “brands.” Respective ideas are only rarely applicable to ho-hum goods and services. Many high-tech companies employ marketing techniques that are only suitable for consumer goods. Some advertising precepts solely concern reminding stuff and are irrelevant to other ad forms.

Ries and Trout called their collection of exceptions, banalities and downright stupidities “22 Immutable Laws of Marketing” (my review of that book [9]). This precipitated an “immutabilitis” pandemic. There have already appeared dozens of books of “Immutable Laws” on all things marketing. The number of “laws” varies from 2 to 22. True, some reviewers suggested Law # 23 – there is nothing immutable in marketing.

This lack of flexibility results in rigid dogmatization of concepts of academic marketing, thus rendering them invalid for real-world marketing.

**Research**

Physics is 100% research. The philosophy, ethics, and techniques of research have been refined for centuries. Its results are of immense importance for society.

**In academic marketing** – Most of “research” is an exercise in futility, with business and society getting noting of it. No wonder that Sony’s Akio Morita, physicist by education, thus admonished his team: “Carefully watch how people live, get an intuitive sense as to what they might want and then go with it. Do not do any market research.” Peter Drucker preached to be cautious with quantitative research.

Whereas in physics many studies are replicated by other laboratories, “In the marketing literature the replication rate was 2.6%... Put another way, over 97% of marketing empirical studies is academic clutter” [2].

Ernest Dichter believed that researchers lack “creativity in thinking” and ability to interpret the data obtained. David Ogilvy wrote: “I notice increasing reluctance on the part of marketing executives to use judgment; they are coming to rely too much on research, and they use it as a drunkard uses a lamp post for support, rather than for illumination.”

Research firms, of course, recommend all sorts of surveys, the longer and more expensive the better [14].

**Terms and definitions**

Descartes said: “Refine the meaning of words, and you would save humanity from most of its delusions.”
Physical “words” are refined so meticulously that any physicist will give you identical definitions of “voltage,” “force,” or “neutron capture cross-section.”

In academic marketing – Academics churn out dozens of terms. Some of them have dozens of definitions. Academic tomes, even those meant for MBA students, are chock-full with banal and/or unnecessary definitions, e.g., “satisfaction,” “trend,” “relationship,” “perception,” “way of life,” “industry,” “market,” “quality.” In addition, there are dozens of nebulous classifications of the obvious.

Publishing

When a physics sophomore, I began freelancing for a semiconductor laboratory as a literature reviewer. It was an exciting experience! Among other things, I was impressed by the logic and consistency of the development of a topic in physics journals. As a topic evolved, after replications of course, new hypotheses were generated and tested, so that in the end it would become a reliable piece of knowledge to be relegated to R&D people for incorporation into novel products.

I was also impressed by the clarity of the language of physics texts.

In academic marketing – Academics took over publishing trappings from physics. As to the content of the stuff, it is often appalling.

Academics compensate for the absence of real science by unintelligible writing. A funny example of that ugly phenomenon was described by Scott Armstrong of Wharton [15]: “32 faculty members were asked to rate the prestige of four passages from management journals. The content of the passages was held constant while readability was varied. Those passages that were more difficult to read were rated higher in research competence.” Can you beat that?

Unlike physics, “each journal and each conference is just a jumble of bricks with the occasional group cemented together by a short term research fad, fashion or multi-researcher project” [2].


If reviewers of academic stuff were practitioners, some of it might be of some value for business.

Assessing other’s work

“Love of truth” (L. Feuerbach) in any science is gauged by the scruples and thoroughness demonstrated by scientists when assessing their own and other’s work. This takes honesty and integrity.

Unlike academic marketing, physics conferences are official and unofficial discussions non-stop, far into the night. Generally, hawk-eyed chairpersons are alert to any deviations from scientific truth and rigor.

The biologist Jorge E. Allende of Chile put it in a nutshell: “In evaluating projects, we must forget who are our friends and enemies, the competitions between Faculties and Universities and rigorously analyze the project within its scientific context, in its relevance and in the thoroughness in the approach of the authors. Every praise and criticism we include in these evaluations should be validly supported” [16].

In academic marketing – The mutual admiration society of academia lets anything fly: fantasies, wishful thinking, kindergarten logic, etc., etc. [17], [18], [19]. I have long stopped attending marketing meetings, except as speaker at practice-oriented seminars. It is a sheer waste of time.

When there appeared talks about some “critical marketing,” I hoped that it will concentrate on the basics. Unfortunately, it just scratches the surface. The convenors of “Critical Marketing Workshop” [20] mention topics “anchored in theoretical perspectives (poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism, queer theory, critical theory, postcolonialism, etc.).” Again hot air!

“The criticism that critical marketing has little relevance to the ‘real world concerns’ is a recurrent one. We propose to discuss the possibility (desirability?) of engagement with managerial practice.” Thank God!

They note that “as critical marketing becomes more broadly accepted… perhaps it runs the risk of losing its mordant edge.” I believe it has already lost it, if it ever had it.

Rigor

I put that issue last because it incorporates most of what has been discussed above. Says Allende: “Rigor is an attitude that contrasts with the weaknesses of human
nature, the acceptance of inexact methods, the adoption 
of groundless conclusions, accepting the predominant 
opinion despite the lack of data which sustain it.”

In academic marketing – Academia like to haran-
gue about rigor, but they have a vague idea of what it 
means in real science. Their rigor is pseudo-rigor; it is 
in essence rigor mortis, mortification of marketing.

It is a huge scandal

According to some estimates, academic marketing 
industry, with journals and all, is worth $1.5 billion. It 
seems to be blithely unaware that it is socially mea-
ningless: most academics produce disastrous marketing 
graduates, do irrelevant research, and publish papers 
only read by other academia, but… nobody commits 
hara-kiri, and only a couple of Donquijotic characters 
make a ripple [2, 3, 4].

Peter Drucker said: “There is nothing so useless as 
doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.” I 
think he meant marketing academics.

I would hate to think that the entire academic mar-
keting community is a crowd of irresponsible morons. But why do they tolerate all that morass? If academics 
really want to be of some value to business and society, 
they need a Perestoika-style revolutionary change.

Why was Perestroika in the USSR successful? One 
of the reasons was that people were sick and tired of 
duplicity and hypocrisy that permeated the entire So-
viet life. Hapless Soviet students had to learn stilted 
Marxist dogmas that had nothing to do with the real 
world out there – not unlike the dogmas of academic 
marketing. Quo vadis?

Physics vs. clien-to-marketing

If acquainted with the work of the best practical 
marketers, a physicist would find a lot of exciting par-
allels between physics and practical marketing.

As a physicist-turned-marketer myself, I cannot 
help thinking of how the multidisciplinary and fuzzy 
domain of marketing could benefit from physical think-
ing and those parallels.

Phenomenology and micro-level

Physicists practice both phenomenological ap-
proaches and micro-level approaches, the former being 
rooted in the latter. For example, when a physicist 
measures or calculates an electric current, he deals with 
phenomenology; when he considers things at the level 
of charge carriers, he takes a micro-level look at the 
situation. For nuclear scientists, the micro-level is that 
of nuclei; for chemists – that of electrons, atoms, and 
molecules. The micro-level picture suggests valuable 
insights and possibilities to control processes.

A counterpart of micro-level in practical marketing 
is the Client: dozens of questions about the way he ar-
ri c es at his buying decision and what influences that.

The Client is the weakest element of academic 
marketing (remember the robotic Linda?). Most aca-
demics start with phenomenology, from slightly mar-
ketinized economics. It is disastrous. It is like attempting 
to build an edifice without a basement.

In clien-to-marketing the Client is the key. Client in-
sights enable a clien-to-marketer to work out effective 
product-selling information and plan the selling ap-
proach. When through with his “micro-level,” a clien-
to-marketer can shift to some phenomenology, e.g., 
target audiences, “Business Development,” etc. At 
some level of his analysis he may even venture into 
neighboring domains of economics.

Measurements

Measurements in marketing resemble those in 
quantum mechanics, where objects are so delicate that 
the very act of measurement destroys them. Precisely 
this happens when market researchers crudely probe 
into delicate motivations of the Client to get just “truth-
ful lies.” Client-marketers seek undistorted results 
using delicate tools, such as observation of shoppers’ 
behavior or “naïve listening.”

“Combinations of opposites”

Aristotle said that “harmony is a blending and 
combination of opposites.” In physics, a striking ma-
ifestation of this combination is radiation – it is waves 
and particles at the same time. In clien-to-marketing, we 
can talk about the harmony of the rational and the emo-
tional in everything.

Our brain has two hemispheres. The left one is said 
to be responsible for logic and speech; the right one, for 
imagination and intuition. Modern physics has become 
so brain-raking that it needs “two-brainers” like Leo-
nardo da Vinci.
Einstein, a good violinist himself, maintained that “the greatest scientists are always artists as well,” stressing that fantasy and intuition had been more important to him than knowledge. Robert Oppenheimer: “Both the man of science and the man of art have always had to deal with the harmonization of what is new with what is familiar.” I admire Niels Bohr’s remark: “No, no, you’re not thinking, you’re just being logical.”

Unlike academic marketing, but like physics, cliento-marketing calls for two-brain thinking in a big way. Ogilvy said of launching a new brand: “That is not work for beginners. It calls for vivid imagination, tempered by marketing acumen; an ability to peer into the future… I doubt whether there are more than a dozen people in the United States who are qualified by temperament and experience to perform such an operation.”

Cliento-marketing is not anybody’s business!

Creativity and “imagination in a straitjacket”

Another Einstein’s wisdom: “The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.” Physics is a creative narcotic. I feel nostalgic sometimes about waves of euphoria that would engulf you, when after many desperate days and nights, things click into order. I kind of re-lived those moments when I was reading books by Claude Hopkins. He so described the way he would normally arrive at a world-shaking decision: “Night after night I paced Lincoln Park, trying to evolve a plan. I held to my old conceptions. Serve better than others, offer more than others, and you are pretty sure to win. One morning I came to the office and said: ‘I have the winning idea’.”

Cliento-marketing is about winning ideas. It is a creative craft of making unique decisions fine-tuned to a given case.

Any creativity begins with imagination, disciplined imagination. James Gleick writes about Feynman [21]: “For Feynman the essence of scientific imagination was a powerful and almost painful rule. What scientists create must match reality. It must match what is already known. Scientific creativity, he said, is imagination in a straitjacket.”

His words are echoed by the outstanding cliento-marketer Theodore Levitt in his book “Marketing Imagination”: “To exercise the imagination is to be creative… It is distinguished from other forms of imagination by the unique insights it brings to understanding customers, their problems and the means to capture their attention and their customs.”

It is imagination that prompts to a creative marketer answers to productive “Client” questions: how the Client lives; what his problems are; how he buys and uses the product; what language he understands; what he knows about a given technology; whether a purchase is simple or complex. And so on and so forth.

Unfortunately, academic (pseudo)marketing has been killing creativity since the 1960s. The first edition (1967) of Kotler’s tome carried a chapter on “Marketing creativity;” but then Kotler quietly removed it. The British marketer Nigel Piercey in his “Market-Led Strategic Change” [22] comes up with an explanation: “My suspicion is that the reason is simple – lecturers and professors using the textbook did not want it to remain, because they want to teach theory, structure and systems, not creativity.”

Piercey is right: Kotler’s clients are not students, not businessmen, not society. His darling clients are marketing professors – they supply to him thousands of student leads for his prosperous publishing business.

Piercey inquires: “When did we forget about creativity in marketing?” Well, perhaps it is time to recall about creativity? What do you think, gentlemen?

Intuition

Again Einstein: “The only real valuable thing is intuition.” Not only in physics. Robert Bernstein, president of Random House, when interviewing MBA graduates, said: “Only intuition can protect you from the most dangerous of all, the articulate incompetent.” Lee Iacocca appealed to managers fresh from the information-crazy Harvard to trust their gut.

Physical thinking vs. marketing thinking

At the very first lecture on physics we were told, much to our surprise, that memory and knowledge were not the most important tools for a modern physicist. We were recommended to develop, with the help of our mentors, refined physical thinking (one professor called it “physical intelligencia-ness”). Some examiners would allow students to prepare for an exam in the library, or use whatever literature. Anyway some would fail the exam, for they were tested not so much
for knowledge, but rather for their thinking.

My experience in practical marketing has shown to me that the ways a physicist and a cliento-marketer progress to their decisions have much in common.

Both rely on a fusion of logic with imagination and intuition. Both require creativity and inventiveness. Both require responsibility and integrity.

One difference of marketing thinking is that its object is the human being (the Client), and so a cliento-marketer should be able not only to think for the Client, but also to feel for the Client. (R. Feynman: “Imagine how much harder physics would be if electrons had feelings!”) Cliento-marketing is sometimes more fun and challenge than physics.

I have laid down the essence of what I view as proper marketing thinking and ways it can be employed as a down-to-earth tool in my book “Marketing Thinking, or Clientomania.” [23]. I have drastically reworked the text for the second edition. I can send its electronic version for comments. It is basically what I teach and use in my consulting work.

Russian Nobel prize laureate Lev Landau held that what makes a physicist is not the text-book, but rather the book of problems. It develops thinking.

At the moment, time permitting, I am working on a book of “problems” in marketing and advertising. I invite any cooperation.

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