

Are you a *shopper marketer*?

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Shopper marketing is a practical discipline; it shouldn't be complicated and convoluted. If you've walked the floor and you are a resolute experimenter, backed by a tenacious attitude and reasonable on-the-ground retail experience, then you probably have the credentials to become a great shopper marketer.



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In my earlier years, it was almost impossible to synergise, strategize and execute a shopper plan. Misaligned meetings month after month resulting in a stalemate and departments finally retreating back to their silos was the order of the day. Since then, I've mediated numerous practical workshops for some leading brands. The focus? Connect the teams; agree on strategy with the final output being an action plan with allocated roles and responsibilities. All this in [just one day](#). In most cases, it is this simple but a shopper marketer needs to be, as Mike Anthony puts it, a [communicator and peace envoy](#).

Making the impossible possible

Many have 'learned failure' when it comes to devising and strategizing shopper solutions. The quick defeatist retort is: *the retailer will never agree to that. Everything we've tried has been shot down or requires even more money beyond our trading terms*. This attitude won't get you anywhere, but passion and persistence will.

It takes a special kind of person to be a shopper marketer; high resilience to rejection and adversity further fuels motivation. As [Herb Sorenson](#) at [Global Shop](#) 2013 said, "If you're achieving your goals, you're setting lousy goals." Based on my experience, of all the shopper campaigns presented, you're in good stead if 20% gain traction. This takes a special breed indeed.

Guts, experience and instinct

Many don't have the luxury of time or money when it comes to shopper research. By the time you've completed the research specification and then implemented, analysed, collated, presented the findings, addressed reverts and then presented to your team, you're easily six months in. In that time a lot can change in the retail landscape and your category.

And as a behaviourist, I only use qualitative and quantitative research as indicative, because what shoppers say and do are two different things. From an investment perspective, a good shopper research project can easily cut 10% or more out of your budget. This is where experience and instinct come in, as no one knows your business better than you.

After a few years of experience, you know what works in each channel, which SKUs have the most traction in these channels, and the impact of varied price promotions in each. You have a view of in-market sales, till data and perhaps most importantly, what can practically be implemented within your organisation through to retail.

This is a powerful mix which drives your instinct, or as [Malcolm Gladwell](#) put it in his book, [Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking](#), "rapid cognition - analysis paralysis vs. frugal information - is the kind of thinking that happens in a blink of an eye." It is driven by intuition, which is fuelled by experience, training and knowledge.

Lastly, it takes guts to follow through since conventional justification and motivation usually eludes a good initiative.

Don't fly everywhere

The best way to get traction is to run pilots and get proof of concept. This just requires persuading a few store managers to join the cause. Choose a minimum of five stores that have the same channel classification and shoppers.

If possible, also choose stores in the same region as this makes it easier to control, observe and eliminate provincial nuances. The easy trap here is that one usually goes for quantity versus quality, running a whole bunch of different pilots which then entails spreading themselves very thin.

Pilots need meticulous attention and constant monitoring with the flexibility to change tact. One needs to prioritise, and generally the adage *less is more* applies, with practical and less-complex initiatives delivering the highest results.

Then it's simply showing the results over the pilot period to gain internal support and retailer adoption, then follow up three months after the campaign to analyse baseline shift. What affect did the campaign have on shopper behaviour?

There's a shopper marketer in all of us

Whether you have dedicated resources or not, shopper marketing should become a part of marketing, sales, trade marketing and the brand's key performance indicators. This drives congruency and breaks teams out of their safe silos.

Previously I had shopper marketing resources, but when the discipline gained traction, we couldn't find additional resources to match the accelerated growth. Our brand and marketing resources assumed a great deal of the responsibility. It's a beautiful thing when a marketing or brand manager also wears a shopper hat.

Conclusion

If you have the fortitude backed by experience, you have perhaps the only legitimate qualification there is for shopper marketing.

ABOUT JASON (FRICH) FRICHOL

My passions are shopper marketing, consumer packaging, visual merchandising, ideation, bankable innovation, integrated marketing, tangible ROI, and execution efficacy. My motto is, "Passion and persistence will get you everywhere." I strive for simplicity, practicality and information frugality.

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