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B2B STRAIGHT UP

Why is the AMI MIA for B2B?

In an awards world made for B2C marketers, **Kimon Lycos** asks the AMI where the B2B awards are.

My time in Sweden gave me a lot. I gained a family, a taste for stylish furniture and some great sayings such as, ‘the cobbler’s children have no shoes’. Ergo – plumbers have lousy plumbing, electricians have death traps at home and I’ve seen ‘things’ in the kitty litter box produced by Hamish, our slightly gay cat, that have more marketing smarts than the AMI.

I don’t blame the AMI per se; it is doomed to fail at marketing by virtue of the fact that it represents the peak body for marketing. I’m sure the CPA guys’ books smell like a baked dinner, and whoever represents builders resides in a burnt-out car under a bridge.

It is in my nature that when I experience something of mind-blowing stupidity, I instantly look for an excuse, a reason, just a shred of logic, because I can’t bear to live in a world where stupidity exists as a free agent.

What I have experienced from the AMI in terms of understanding its market and how to market to its market has been indeed stupid, but, as I pointed out, it is not its fault.

Life is full of delicious examples of irony, and thankfully so. Examples such as allowing people to say witty things like, “Did you hear about the marketing association that didn’t know about marketing? Talk about ironic, eh!”

Let me explain... imagine you run the AMI and you take the guise of representing marketers. This would require you to have a solid grasp of your potential market, especially if you are a membership organisation. So what would you do if someone pointed out that you are missing

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out on a segment of your total market that could boost growth by 20 percent? No finger pointing, just a nice conversation on the phone, followed by an email detailing what the segment is, why it could be 20 percent growth and even some ideas about how to make it happen.

That’s a snapshot of what I did for the AMI in regards to the B2B segment of marketing. This is not a B2C versus B2B thing. I understand and accept that B2C will deservedly dominate the marketing landscape.

I would respectfully suggest, however, that in total the balance of 80 percent prejudice to B2C with 20 percent for B2B makes sense. Currently with the AMI it is 100 percent B2C and sod all for us who sell technology and innovation to other companies.

If I were a member of the AMI, I would have serious concerns about the lack of understanding my representative body had for marketing in the two major categories that fall under marketing, B2C and B2B. It’s not all that hard to understand that within marketing there are a range of segments, each fighting tooth and nail to gain a place in the sun.

Explaining this to the AMI, however, feels like discussing the origins of string theory to someone who still produces energy by banging rocks together.

Logically, if it struggles to comprehend its own marketing requirements and potential, it’s terrifying to think that it is trying to contribute to others, and represent us, the true marketers. No wonder the perception of marketing in either field is often sniffed at.

Picking up on the logic of the cobbler’s children having no shoes, perhaps we should look at the CPA. As much as it hurts to be outwitted at marketing by accountants, we can soothe the hurts by stealing its ideas and strategy with vigour – plagiarism is a marketer’s best friend after all.

On the B2B front, there was a glimmer of hope at seeing a new category last year at the AMI Awards – B2B marketing communications. I gracefully ignored the fact that no one contacted me from the AMI to say thanks for the tip, but when I looked at the criteria, I was overjoyed at not being connected to it. Again, more rock banging, just a slightly different tune.

There was no substance, no meat, nothing at all to suggest that whoever cooked up the category understood B2B, and therefore those who were to judge had little in the way of correctly assessing if entrants did indeed deserve recognition.

To plaster a generic label of 'B2B marketing communications' for an entire segment of marketing was confirmation of my worst fear – the AMI, even with a complete blueprint, still couldn't connect the dots.

The winner? A home loan wholesale product that is sold to mortgage brokers, the type of product that is at the eye of the GFC storm, with low doc requirements and painful increases of interest rates for people who really should not be getting a loan in the first place.

I laughed so hard my liver is now best friends with my spleen.

For those of you not involved in B2B or who have little understanding of B2B, here is what you missed out on because the AMI got it wrong.

You missed discovering some brilliant companies in Australia that develop state-of-the-art technology and innovation, stuff that often takes up to 15 years just to commercialise. These same companies then tear themselves into pieces to market globally into industries with fierce competition, long sales processes and millions of dollars on the line with every deal.

You missed companies transforming the way healthcare is delivered, redefining lean manufacturing, performing miracles with water efficiency or providing workable solutions for climate change. B2B marketing embraces these and many others seismically sized significant industries.

Stuff that you may never hear about, but they change the way you are treated in hospitals, they make our economy more competitive and they just may help to save the planet.

What we got from the esteemed AMI for the first award in B2B was a home loan product, sold by commission-only salespeople, who in turn used it to contribute to the sub-prime crisis. Oh dear.

I see that the AMI has an award for this year using the same old generic category for B2B marketing communications. I would love to see some more effort put into B2B



awards for these hard-working, highly skilled marketers. Check this out, and AMI – go ahead and use anything you like, you did before, but just don't cock it up this time.

My dream award categories – B2B marketing:

- ◆ best new brand
- ◆ best international product launch
- ◆ best national product launch
- ◆ best brand management
- ◆ best integrated sales force campaign
- ◆ best integrated marketing communications campaign
- ◆ best marketing innovation for improved competitive edge
- ◆ most creative advertising or direct mail, and
- ◆ most compelling collateral material.

Personally, I would like to have more awards focused on the creative side simply because those who do manage to produce stunning creativity often do so against significant opposition.

There could be an extra category for, 'B2B marketer who had the guts, guile and grace to get a brilliant idea past engineers, without it being torn to pieces, like a chocolate coated hamster in a pack of mad hyenas'.

Wordy I know, but a highly accurate reflection of what many face internally when striving for overall marketing and communications excellence.

I write all this understanding two very key points:

- ◆ as mentioned, the AMI is doomed to mediocrity with marketing because it represents marketing, and
- ◆ it's easy to stand back and lambast an organisation by flaying it mercilessly in public for any shortcoming.

Honestly, I don't know what the exact situation is with the AMI. Perhaps it has an inordinate amount of incredibly difficult work to perform and not even the bastard child of Steven Hawking and David Ogilvy could cope. Or, there is a methane gas leak that's been undetected for many years underneath it, slowly depleting its brain cells.

All I do know is, the peak body of marketing is MIA with B2B, and has been so for many years. I don't know why exactly, but it's a shame for all those B2B marketers who work hard and get results. It's also a shame for those who need more resources, who want to improve and develop professionally. **M**