Book reviews

The Invisible Touch. The Four Keys to Modern Marketing

Harry Beckwith

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Following in the slipstream of the author's acclaimed 'Selling the Invisible', 'The Invisible Touch' continues on the same practical theme, widening and deepening the knowledge and understanding of successful services applications in a business context. Beckwith writes as a marketing practitioner and his 225 pages of anecdotes are remarkably devoid of pure marketing theories. Nevertheless, marketers would be 'hypermyopic' to dismiss his offering for this reason alone but, like its predecessor, the appropriate relevant anecdotes and examples can be extracted and distilled to help those in both academic and business worlds understand, in extra practical depth, the extra 3Ps of the service marketing mix.

'The Invisible Touch' comprises seven chapters, each of which is broken down into several manageable sections comprising mainly anecdotes and examples within an American context, many of them vividly brought to the reader's attention by the author's own experience (his own interpretation of his feelings during a Laura Nyro Concert provides a classic case, differentiating between the product, the service and the overall experience affected by the relationship). Beckwith continues his

scepticism towards qualitative research, introduced in 'Selling the Invisible', arguing for a distinction between hard evidence gained under a controlled environment (eg focus groups) and his preferred soft evidence characterised by (you guessed it) anecdotal evidence, obtained under less controlled, freer conditions.

Without giving away all of Beckwith's trade secrets, his four keys to modern marketing are price, brand, packaging and relationship. His typical use of examples includes the cult film 'Pulp Fiction' where fans can revisit the diner/club scene with John Travolta and Uma Thurman. Here Travolta is attracted by the high-priced \$5 milkshake to emphasise that 'higher prices don't just talk; they tempt'. The author utilises one of his strengths: the simple use of an interesting everyday situation or anecdote followed up by a shorter, in some cases memorable, sentence, eg 'Our inability to distinguish quality leaves us enormously susceptible to other cues about a services quality — and a service's price provides one of those few clues'. There may, however, be the odd inconsistency to the otherwise smooth logical flow: the author consistently argues against low pricing strategies

(‘Don’t charge less–sell better! The low price position kills!’) but neglects to give sufficient comment on the success of (Asda) Wal-Mart pursuing this very strategy.

Those seeking a deeper and yet practical meaning to the concept of brand would be advised to read this chapter. Beckwith’s section on ‘The Physics of a Brand’ impressed and hopefully will leave the readers developing their own concepts: upwardly and downwardly mobile brands come to mind and perhaps directors of Marks & Spencers among others might reflect here. Beckwith structures his chapter on relationships well, emphasising the eight keys to lasting relationships which may be appearing on more than a few

presentation slides before too long. If merely browsing, his section on completeness is worthy of attention.

‘The Invisible Touch’ is clearly targeted at the same audience as its predecessor, ‘Selling the Invisible’, possessing many of its strengths and caveats. When considering the two books together, arguably ‘Selling the Invisible’ provides more poignant and memorable anecdotes, but ‘The Invisible Touch’ can stand on its own as a thought-provoking work; parts of which may be incorporated in academic case studies or as part of an overall company strategy.

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