
Gummeson, Evert – Total Relationship Marketing

Butterworth Heinemann, 2002, [Business] Grade ★★

This is an over ten-year-old book on a subject – relationship marketing - that has grown in importance with the spreading of the Internet, e-commerce and of what's become known as "big data". Evert Gummeson is Professor Emeritus of Service Marketing and Management at the Stockholm Business School and the Chartered Institute of Marketing in the UK list him as one of the 50 most important contributors to the development of marketing. I fully agree with the thesis of the book, several of the topics described are interesting and to top it off, Philip Kotler is one of those endorsing the book. Still, I don't like it.

The author's aim is to point to the faulty premise that the 4Ps of the Marketing Mix constitute The General Theory of marketing. Despite mainly being targeted at mass marketing of standardized consumer goods the quartet of Product, Price, Promotion and Place dominates the teachings of marketing all over the world. When it comes to marketing of services, of B2B-products, less standardized products or even online sales, the Marketing Mix is not as applicable. Instead the real world focus of the marketing effort shifts to relationships, networks, co-operation etc. At the very end of the book the author states that he aims to right this faulty premise by initiating the development of a new general theory of marketing.

The attempt results in "30Rs", that is thirty relationships. One after one Gummeson lists a number of relations that affect the company. He then discusses a number of more or less loosely related topics to this relationship tying in various aspects of interactions and collaborations and moves on to the next relation. This makes a very odd book since many of the relationships listed are very far off from what is normally thought of as marketing. Some more exotic examples can be

the legal relationship, the criminal relationship, the relationship to knowledge and governmental agreements in international organizations like WTO. Agreed, business is dominated and built on interactions between people, but does this mean that all relations that in some way affect business is marketing? My answer would be no. If a business concept becomes broad enough to encompass everything it loses its meaning.

The text wanders from one topic to another without real structure and without giving much practical advice on how to use the relationships to market goods or services. The problem is that marketing is a very practical discipline. Its purpose is to sell stuff. This I don't know how to use. The commentary around the relationships is also full of rather personal opinions on everything from genetically modified food, the inability of financial accounting to measure what's important, the evils of stock brokers and god knows what. Only at the very end of the book an attempt to build a theoretical foundation is made, leaving the reader more confused than necessary until the last chapters.

I fully believe that in relationship marketing the service or product is only half the quality of the product. The other half of the quality is built on character, honesty, transparency, authenticity, fairness etc. – that is on relationship. The problem is that the lack of structure and logic leaves the reader abandoned. The author even admits that he himself was troubled by failing to find a uniting logic to all the relationships – until he realized that this search for logic was misguided as there is nothing to say that the relationships should let themselves be subsumed into existing thought patterns.

Interesting subject, wrong book.

Mats Larsson, November 10, 2014