

Management's Choice

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Marketing Management, An Asian Perspective, by Philip Kotler with Siew Meng Leong, Swee Hoon Ang & Chin Tiong Tan (Prentice Hall-Published by Simon & Shuster Singapore 1996), Pages 1055, Price Rs 750/-

Philip Kotler, a leading authority on Marketing and author of over 15 books, needs no introduction to Sri Lankans. He is the Professor of International Marketing at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, USA. His books on management are read and re-read and are used in our universities as text books. The co-authors of this book, are teaching Marketing Management at the National University of Singapore.

Asia is recognised as the fastest growing region in the world and the cultivation of markets is an integral part of the success story of Asia. The Japanese running around photographing everything that came into focus was a big joke among western manufacturers until they faced stiff competition from Japan and realised that photo-taking was not just for souvenirs. Asian companies, thus began to produce not only quality goods but also products which had good value.

In Peter Howard's powerful play, "Mr Brown comes down the hill", Mr Brown represents Christ who is questioned by a group of new moralist bishops who think what is morally wrong can be excused by passing legislation which can correct behaviour. "What is Truth?",

Mr Brown is asked, similar to the question that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus Christ nearly 2000 years ago. Mr Brown does not keep silent or hesitate. "Truth", he replied, "is the right you deny and the wrong you justify".

Similarly, though not in so profound a manner, the question can be asked, "What is Marketing?" The book has the answer. Marketing is the process of choosing which markets to be in, the products to offer, prices to charge, distributors to use, and messages to send. It is a larger idea than selling.

"Sellers focus on finding customers for what they make. Marketers focus on finding out what people want, and therefore on what to make. Marketing is an enlightened and socially-oriented discipline because it aims to identify, serve and satisfy human needs. Marketing is the process by which organisations develop and adjust their offerings to the ever-changing needs and wants of the marketplace", say the authors.

What is stressed is that one cannot survive in isolation and that today there is only one world. Countries that isolate themselves from the mainstream markets and mainstream technological developments deprive their people of modern goods and improved living standards, say the authors.

They say that each country must learn to make goods that other countries value, in order to earn the revenue to buy the goods it values. They do not see much difference between individuals and countries, when the issue is constant improvement of skills and capabilities in creating wealth.

The definition of marketing, according to the authors, is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products of value with others. The book has ubiquitous quotes from *Peter Drucker*, one of the leading management gurus of our day. He believes that there will always be need for some selling but the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. Theodore Levitt puts it more directly. "Selling focuses on the need of the seller; Marketing on the needs of the buyer. Selling is pre-occupied with the seller's need to convert his product into cash; Marketing with the idea of satisfying the needs of the customer by means of the product and the whole cluster of things associated with creating, delivering and finally consuming it."

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The book is not full of theory, because virtually every page has practical examples taken from the case files of major corporations around the world. But what is important is that, these are not just examples of what worked but also what did not work. One cannot merely adopt what has worked in one market and expect it to work similarly in another market. Each market has its own peculiarities. In one market, deodorant may work but in another it may be identified as being used by those who constantly have body odour. The answer? Call it body spray.

It reminds me of an interview I once had with a British trade unionist, who said, "Those who never make mistakes never make decisions."

A Japanese proverb says, "Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare". To ensure that there is action, marketing tools, marketing environment, public relations, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing are some of the methods discussed at length. You name it, the authors have delved into great details to bring up many treasures. Even the layman will find this book of help, because of the width of its scope and the clarity of the examples given.

Does one need to shout out about products to the world? The authors answer that question with an apt poem, written anonymously.

The codfish lays ten thousand eggs, The homely hen lays one. The codfish never cackles, To tell you what she's done And so we scorn the codfish while the humble hen we prize. It only goes to show you That it pays to advertise.



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