

NEW MARKETING IN AN OLD WORLD

Starting From Scratch In Professional Services Marketing In An Old Culture

MARKETING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES IN ASIA, By Robert C. Sawhney. LexisNexis (China), 2009. 190 pp. Paper. \$65.00. To order click [here](#).

Reading this remarkable book makes me feel like an archeologist, simply because marketing professional services in Asia is just about where we in the United States were in 1977, when the *Bates* decision started this whole marketing thing. It's like digging up artifacts of a different time. It was a time when we were discovering the uniqueness of professional services marketing, and why it was different from traditional forms of product marketing, and developing new techniques for dealing with that difference. And it was a time when lawyers and accountants had to learn the real meaning of competition, and that the earth didn't crumble as a result of frank marketing by lawyers and accountants.

Reading this book offers a wonderful insight into marketing professional services in inscrutable Asia, and particularly China and Hong Kong, where Sawhney, an experienced marketer, practices his craft. What is old to us is new to Asia. To put it bluntly, it ain't easy.

Marketing in China and the region is not the only thing that's new. For example, it was only in 1980 that the Chinese government began to recognize the need for CPAs. As a marketer, Sawhney had to start from scratch, which led him into the same obstructions, negative attitudes, cultural problems, and resistance to marketing that those of us who started doing it in the late 1970s encountered. He even faced the skepticism of academics. Perhaps because we had a basic understand of the concept of competition that we've moved beyond what we encountered here in the early days. Marketing professional services, he notes, may now be relatively mature in the U.S., but in Asia and Hong Kong, it's still in the embryonic stages of acceptance and understanding.

Sawhney has several things going for him that we didn't have in the old days. He has experience in professional services marketing, and brings it to Asia like a missionary. He has a blank slate on which to write not only the rules of marketing professional services, but the imagination and knowledge to do it. And he has the experience of successful marketing in the United States and Canada and Great Britain to use as a weapon against skeptical Asian professionals and the obtuse Asian culture that demonstrates that marketing actually works, without diminishing the traditions for honor and probity that are the pride of the professions. He has the knowledge and skills to demonstrate how to keep the professional firm, anywhere in the world, relevant to the changing nature of its clientele.

Fortunately, he is a knowledgeable marketer with the enthusiasm and fortitude to move professionalism in marketing to new heights in Asia. His book, moreover, chronicles not only the story of the struggles to get the culture to accept marketing as a legitimate business enterprise, but is a handbook of sophisticated marketing that can serve to educate all readers in all countries, regardless of experience. Furthermore, he understands that marketing is a process, and not merely the manipulation of its mechanics.

The range of techniques and aspects of marketing that he covers is extensive and thoughtful, and includes definitions of the professional service firm and its relation to marketing, strategic management and marketing. He explains clearly how to and put it all together to make it work. He goes beyond the standard texts to cover the uniqueness of Asian professional services marketing and its role in the Asian firm and culture. He explains service quality, which is rarely articulated, and strategy for both the large and small firm. He discusses pricing and managing client relationships. In other words, the book is comprehensive and meticulous – in addition to being well written and useful to both beginners and experienced practitioners.

alike. It's references are well documented

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Looking back at what we faced here during the early days of marketing, and soon after in Canada and Britain, there is something brave about what he's doing. Here, the first decade or so after *Bates* made marketing professional services possible after generations in which frank marketing was prohibited. Getting lawyers and accountants to accept the meaning of that Supreme Court decision was a monumental task. In some quarters here, it still goes on. But to know this, and still start from the beginning in Asia took both extensive knowledge and courage, both of which he has.

This is a book that should be read and reread, and reside on the desk of both marketers and lawyers and accountants, and referred to frequently. The author knows what this stuff is about, and he teaches it well.

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