The Process of Marketing Segmentation

Guest was Malcolm McDonalds

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Transcription of Interview

Professor Malcolm: Well let me tell you, that your own Harvard Business Review a few years ago, they wrote about 30,000 new products being launched in America and 90% of them failing because of lack of market segmentation, so it's pretty important, isn't it?

Joe: *I'm a big believer in it, and everybody thinks they can do that Peppers and Roger's type of one on one marketing.*

Professor Malcolm: That's a complete load of nonsense there. I mean I'm not saying I'm disrespectful to my scholarly colleagues, but all I'm saying is that most of the world isn't like that I'm afraid. Most of the world is business to business, not the consumer. That's the first thing and also a lot of it is service nowadays and market segmentation. Look, I can tell you Joe that I've got 127 scholarly references that show that what causes continuous financial success are three basic things. The first one is actually defining your market in terms of needs, not in terms of products. The second one is proper needs-based segmentation which most organizations I'm afraid to say misunderstand; they get it wrong. And the other one is about making a specific offer to each of the segments that you've identified and then, of course, everything follows on from that. You get differentiation positioning of branding. It's so basic.

And let me tell you something else and I spend I suppose 90% of my time with the boards of companies, operating boards I'm talking about, lovely companies like IBM and Siemens and companies like that, I learn a hell of a lot from them. These companies are brilliant, but most companies are not like those companies. I say to the directors who are sitting in front of me, I say, without talking to each other, write down in order of priority what your key target markets are, and you'll never guess what the numpties do. They start writing down their products, and I say, no, no, no. I didn't ask you to write your products down. I asked you to write your markets down, and most people seem incapable of doing it and, of course, it's so serious Joe if you think about it. I mean all those years ago, IBM nearly went bankrupt because they thought they were in the mainframe market. Gestetner did go bankrupt because they thought they were in the duplicating market. Kodak is the recent one; the massive, massive Kodak thought they were in the films and camera market. And then you got Nokia thinking they're in the phones market, and you've seen the consequences of the way people think about products and I will tell you, Joe, that from where I am, here in the heart of the United Kingdom, there are no bad products around today. All the products are excellent. I don't know any organization that's got crap products. They've got products that work. They're all as good as each other. That excellence is taken for granted. It isn't by having a good product that you make money; it's the way you relate to your market.

And of course, when you talk about relating to your market, you talk about market segmentation and of course one of the other things Joe which I until recently was the chairman of the company that does brand evaluations for little companies like Shell and what have you, but in the UK, 80% of all corporate value is in intangibles. It isn't intangible assets. Those are irrelevant because the world is full of buildings and what have you. It's the relationship you have with your customers and of course, that is where the heart and soul of successful business strategy is market segmentation. I mean I write about it, I teach it, I'm passionate about it, not because I start with the answer and trying to make the problem fit the answer I've got, it's just that I know that if you can get a company to understand its market and segment it properly in terms of needs, then future is absolutely guaranteed. Its future profitability is guaranteed.

If you think about the biggest disservice that was ever done to mankind, it was the 20th-century economist who said that consumers are irrational, so they maximize the utility of the margin using perfect information. I have never ever in my life met a rational person. And people, people twitter on about selling to companies, and I say, you don't sell to a company. There's no such thing as a company. You sell to people in companies. So segmentation applies especially strongly in business to business markets because you sell to people. For me, even the neurologists in the world discovered that people are not rational. They make decisions based on emotions; no matter what circumstance you're in. And they repeated these neurologists, it was written up in one of these very, very stringent medical journals, they repeated -- you know the famous Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola test? Yes, the one that's been done for 40 years where they give people the blind bottles and everyone prefers or 65% prefer Pepsi Cola as opposed to Coca-Cola. And then they open them up, and they give them the same test with the labels on them and guess what, 65% prefer Coca Cola and not Pepsi Cola. Well these neurologists, they did the same experiment a number of times with people who had the bit of the brain that is the emotional bit damaged. It's called ventromedial prefrontal cortex; would you believe? And guess what, no matter what happened, they still preferred the taste of Pepsi Cola. It's amazing, isn't it? After all these years, people still think of customers as being rational, and

I say I've never, ever, ever in my life Joe, met a rational person.

And let me tell you one little story which is true. Many, many years ago, I was in a market near in Oxford, an open market because I live near Oxford. My wife told me to get apples, and she told me to pay 23 pence a pound for these apples. So I looked around, and I found this stall with the apples and they were 25p, and I thought, I better have a look around to see if I can find some cheaper ones. I did find some cheaper ones at the other end of the stall, and they were 20 pence a pound and they looked the same as the 25 pence ones. I said to this little market trader, I said, excuse me and he said, yes sir? I said, what's the difference between the 25 pence ones and the 20 pence ones? He said, nothing whatever sir. I said, well why are those 25 pounds and those 20? He looked at me as if I was mad. He said, those sir, the 25p ones are for people who want to pay 25 pence.

In every audience I get, I look at them and say, you're all in the 25p apple market. Don't lie to me. I'm a doctor, doctor, doctor. I know you're all in the 25p market. Look at the way they dress. Look at everything. Look at the cars they drive. We wouldn't have any BMW's or Mercedes or anything like that if we were rational. Anyway, Joe, I've been wittering on. You probably wanted to ask me some questions about market segmentation.

Joe: *I think you're making great sense, and I think people downplay the simple side of it and the obvious part of market segmentation, but one of the questions that you raised when you were talking is that it is all about people, don't you segment by companies or do you segment by – you're saying you segment by markets.*

Professor Malcolm: Let me explain why most segmentation and by that I mean, about 85% of companies don't understand segmentation. They segment by -- if it's consumer, they do socio-economics or if it's business, they do demographics, and some of them do geo-demographics. But think about socio-economics, can I tell you that Boy George and the Archbishop of Canterbury are both socio-economic A. Do you think they behave the same? Well yes, apart from wearing dresses and singing a lot, they don't behave the same. It's nonsense, but then you have demographics, all women between ages of 18 and 21, they all behave exactly the same, don't they? And the answer is, no, don't be stupid. And geo-demographics, classification of regional A, everybody in my street behaves exactly the same. It's a total and utter nonsense. It never has worked, and it never will work. It works at a very high level of aggregation where clearly if you make let's say beds or something, or fridges or that kind of thing, clearly the market for newlyweds is going to be better than the market for old gits like me, but everybody's got that down. It's a very, very high level of aggregation. It gives you no differential advantage of any kind, but you got to go beyond that.

The way I do it with companies is very simple. The first thing I do is I get them to do a market map. In other words, you say from the originator and you and all your competitors through to the final use, how does it actually get there and who makes the decisions about what is purchased? And once you know who makes the decision, I'd give you an example. Radiators, for example, in the UK the market's worth about 6 million radiators so they're made, distributed by distributors, they're installed by installers, and then you get who makes the decision about which radiator goes in what walls. So you get all the buildings, the different kinds of buildings, new buildings and etcetera, etcetera and I was talking to this one company, and I said, well what about architects? And they said, well they're not a customer of course. And I said, do they have an influence on what radiator goes on what wall and the answer is yes. Well, they are your customer because if they are the ones who are making the decision, you've got to segment architects so you can communicate with them.

So you begin to see Joe how market segmentation, once you understand how to do it properly and, of course, I haven't explained that to you yet, you've got to decide which market it is that you actually want to segment. I say the mistake people make, they talk about, they witter on about their wretched products, in financial services you get somebody wittering on about pensions, and I say, pensions are one of many, many products you can buy to satisfy your set of needs. So let's have a look at the retirement income market, find out where pensions fit in there and then let's have a look at who makes the decisions, and it could be banks, it could be financial advisers, it could be your mom or your dad, once you understand that, and you say, well let's say 60 plus percent of the decisions are made by one of those adjunctions, that's where you start doing your segmentation, and that's where you start getting differential advantage because you're giving the right messages. If you take for example a classic where you get some idiotic person doing direct marketing, direct mail, and they mailed out 3 million or something or a million things, and I said what response did you get and they said, 3%. I want to stab myself in the eye with a fork because that means they offended 97% of the people they sent them to. And you think of the stuff that's up your mail when you go home tonight, I guarantee most of it is total, utter irrelevant garbage because the people who sent it to you didn't segment the market and send you something that's likely to get your interest and attention.

I haven't of course talked about how you go about segmenting markets but all I'm saying is it's not that rubbish which I talked about, socioeconomics, demographics, geo-demographics, you've got to do that, but that is too high a level of aggregation to give you any differential advantage of any kind. Does that make sense?

***Joe:** So you're saying that if I do segment properly, all that 2, 3% response rate should at least go up to 5 or something, right?*

Professor Malcolm: If I didn't get something like 70 or 80, I'd want to commit suicide, to be honest. It means you haven't thought about it. You've just done this massive, I'll send it to everybody, irrespective of who they are, what their attitudes are, what their behaviors are, what their interests are, what socioeconomic group they belong to, I'll just do this mass email and guess what, that's how that industry works and in my experience, a lot of it, not all of them but a lot of it is a disgrace because they haven't actually done the basics right, so waste their client's money.

***Joe:** Can you start out with some of the basics of segmentation that we can briefly talk about to get us headed in the right direction?*

Professor Malcolm: Okay, well the first thing is that people -- I always get cross when people say 'we segment by' and I say, no you don't. I say that's production orientation. It's absolute production bullshit that. You don't segment a market. A market is there; a 100% of something is bought and used. Our job is to get in there and find out what is bought, where they buy it, how did they buy it, why they buy it and who they are. The who they are comes later on because these were what I call micro-segments, and it's very easy with a group of experienced executives to develop about 30 to 35 of those micro-segments of different patterns of actual behavior. Not supposed behavior but actual behavior.

Once you've generated those, it's very easy to get a piece clustering software and pull them together, and you end up with between 7 and 9 segments. Now everybody in those segments isn't exactly the same, but they're more like the people in that segment than people in another segment. But once you've got that, even if you can't change the product that you're selling to them, and most companies can't actually develop a product specifically for them, it's the way you communicate with them. You're actually giving them a message that's hitting the right notes, appealing more to their needs and what they really need. My experience is you don't have to do vast amounts of research. I mean that's another industry that makes me very cross because so much of the money that's spent on it is wasted because they go out and ask people stupid questions about what they want, and nobody ever in this world knows what they want.

I can give you an example of what I mean. Let's take the 18th century where we had horses and carriages and somebody comes up to -- you know, I'm in this carriage with you and a couple of other people, and somebody stops the horse and opens the carriage door and says to me, what do you want? And I say, how kind of you to ask. Can you go away and invent the internal combustion engine for me, please? And they say, what's that and I say, it's the associated emission, the 0.0 gram of air-producing ions carrying one electrostatic quantity of electricity. And they say, that's good, we are going to do that. And then they say to you, what do you want? And you say, well this whole stinks, could you go away and invent air-conditioning? And they say to the third person, what do you want? And they say, well could you invent windscreen wipers? And they say to the fourth person, what do you want? And they say, what about ABS brakes? Do you see Joe, it's a load of total and utter nonsense. Absolute nonsense! And that's why the market research industry is in such a mess.

But anyway, we're beginning to move away from the core subject. The point I'm making is that there is an actual market for anything that's sold, the market segmentation process which is outlined in the book is to get in there and take it to pieces to find out groupings of people who have similar needs and that includes what they buy, where they buy it, how they buy it, how they use it and so on and so forth.

Once you understand that, the segmentation process getting 7, 8, 9 segments out becomes comparatively easy, and once you've got them, they never, ever change. They very, very rarely change those segments. They usually are pretty well the same across the globe as well. You might have more in one segment in France than in Britain and fewer in another but generally speaking, segments are the same all over the world. For me, if you don't segment your market properly, you're not going to get rich. For me, it's the route to getting rich, doing it properly.

Joe: *Well, you're saying it's really one of the first things that you should be taking a look at after you have this idea of a product or something.*

Professor Malcolm: Absolutely right. Absolutely right. That Harvard Business Review, actually I haven't got the reference at the moment, people think up things, and they say, oh that's good, and then they launch it, they launch it to the world and their wives and their answer is, that's why about 90% of these 30,000 new products that were launched in America, why they failed because there was no concept of segmentation upfront. And you're quite right; segmentation is the very, very first thing that should appear in any kind of strategy marketing. I don't care what it is; I don't care whether it's farming, pharmaceuticals, construction, fast moving consumer goods – it's the very, very first thing that should happen, and once you've got that, everything else will fall into place. I mean if you take for example why a lot of communications are wasted, why this whole digital thing is largely a waste of time, you think about what the sales process is in any organization, the first step is recognizing some kind of exchange potential, the second step is actually initiating some kind of dialogue with the people. The next one is actually exchanging information, and the next one is negotiating and tailoring, and the final one is committing. Now all of that is dyadic and of course if you think about the channels that you've got from personal selling to all the electronic channels to advertising, direct marketing, telephone – if you've got your segment, if you've got your segmentation, what your job is to understand how the people in that segment actually go through those processes rather than – you know, I've done lots of research into this, and you'll find that in the travel industry for example where you've got say 9 segments, each of those segments goes through that sales process using different media in a different way. Now if you don't understand that, how the hell can you have an integrated, digital strategy or an integrated communication strategy? You're just marmalading your offer across some mythical average customer or consumer, and that's why so much marketing budget is wasted.

Joe: *You're saying that big data isn't necessarily creating better segmentation, right?*

Professor Malcolm: Well no, big data won't do anything for you. CRM won't do anything for you. I've got this lovely cartoon that shows these people saying, now we've got his new CRM system, and we can stop thinking. And the answer is, no you can't. CRM is brilliant, as is big data; they're absolutely brilliant. All it will do is give you better, more accurate data for segmenting your market and understanding your customers and your consumers, so we're blessed today. When I was marketing sales director of Canada Dry many, many years ago, we weren't blessed with all of that wonderful data but you do get so many organizations waste money. I mean in Europe alone, you've got something like 27 billion Euros wasted every year on people buying CRM systems, thinking it's going to solve all their problems. But if you put garbage in Joe, you're going to get garbage out, aren't you?

So you've got to use your brain and one of the first planks in all decent strategies, in all winning strategies is proper, deep understanding of your market and proper needs-based segmentation and then CRM, big data, wow, absolutely wonderful. They're marvelous and aren't we blessed today having those kinds of things available to us. I had none of it when I was marketing sales director of Canada Dry. We used to have to go out and do market research and so on.

Joe: *Well I have to ask you; I mean the first edition of market segmentation was written when?*

Professor Malcolm: Oh, that one was written something like about 1997 and the reason I wrote it was very simple; because I kept asking people about market segmentation and discovered that they rarely, rarely got beyond demographics and socio-economics and geo-demographics, and as I've said, everybody's got that, no differential advantage. And when I looked around, I couldn't find a book or anything that actually spelled out step by step how you do it, so I painstakingly sat down and wrote the book and I think it is in its fourth edition now. Lots of companies all over the world, they use it as their sort of bible if you see what I mean. They say we're not getting anywhere with segmentation. The segmentation we've got doesn't work. Let's do it properly.

And indeed I'm just in the middle of a major market segmentation study for a massive, massive American company. I better not say who but it is a massive, well-known American company. And guess what, they discovered me through the book on market segmentation. Once I'm training them to be able to do it all over the world, because I'm a great believer in passing skills on to my clients, once we've done a segmentation study, and they know how to do it, they'll be able to spread it around the world without employing me which I think is the way all consultants should work in truth.

Joe: *What you're saying in market segmentation, you've been kind of preaching that it's a needs-based and behavior-based is the way you segment the market?*

Professor Malcolm: Yes, I mean I'll give you an example of this Joe. Way back in the late eighties, we had a company called ICI, they used to call themselves Imperial Chemical Industries and they had a massive, massive global domination of fertilizer and the bottom fell out of the market because the Russians started dumping urea all over the place, and they turned from being very profitable to a big loss. They tried everything; they tried all bullshit that companies tried, downsizing, outsourcing and all the rest of it and I call that 'anorexia industrialosa' which is an excessive desire to be leaner and fitter leading to emaciation and eventually death. How many pence can you get out of a pound? How many cents can you get out of a dollar?

Anyway eventually, we did this market segmentation study and they never, ever bothered would you believe with farmers because they sold, like most business to business companies do, they sold directly to a distributor and the distributor sold to farmers. And I said well, hang on, distributors can buy anybody's fertilizer. Let's have a look at the farmers and we looked at the farmers and we came out with 8 segments that was the price segment which is incidentally never greater than 10% in any country in the world. Then you had the sort of summarizing it, the show-off farmer who liked the look of crops, and he liked the appearance of crops, he liked to have white fences and clean cows and so on. And the new had this guy, I forget his name now, we gave him names, but there was a guy who thought he was Einstein, the technical farmer. He used to drive around his farm on a tractor with an aerial attached to a satellite, and he used to analyze the soil and then mix his own ingredients. And nobody ever, ever bothered to understand the way these people actually behaved. Once we've done that, we were able to save millions of plans on pointless market product development. What we did, we started focusing on the farmers that didn't buy on price and ICI fertilizers became the most profitable fertilizer company in the world and ICI is the most profitable subsidiary and nobody in the fertilizer world had the faintest idea how ICI were making all this money. And it was very simple, very elementary market segmentation, Joe. This is the impact you have all over the world when you get your market segmentation right.

Joe: *Reviewing your Website, is it taking segmentation to another level when you talk about key account management? Is that the next step?*

Professor Malcolm: Now key account management that's my other passion in life. What's happened today as you know in the world is that the 80/20 rule has gone mad. You've only got 10 car companies left in the world. More and more, the world is becoming concentrated in the hands of a few very, very, very large global players. And once you understand that, you've then got to start saying, okay segmentation is something that happens for your marketing strategy, and you have to have a marketing strategy for your markets. But within that marketing strategy, you've also got to understand somebody like General Motors, or IBM, or 3M or whoever happens to be the customer and that's where key account management comes in. Now I don't call it segmentation but there is a form of segmentation in there, and it's exactly the same process whereby you're trying to understand who makes the decisions in those companies and what do they really, really need. Now, so I don't call it segmentation but it's a very similar process to it. When I came over not so long ago to Washington DC and spent the day with the main board of a mega, mega American company, I better not say what products they're in otherwise you might guess who they are but their products cost mega, multi-billion dollars for each one. Now if you're going to sell those to somebody like the American Air Force, my God, you better understand how the American Air Force operates. You better understand their structure. You better understand what they really need. You better understand what you can do for them that's going to create an advantage for them as opposed to just avoiding a disadvantage, and that's key account management Joe, which is another highly specialized product. I'm kind of enjoying coming to the States and doing key account management programs with all the lovely companies, and they all fairly enjoy it and they all make loads and loads of dosh as a result of it.

People say to me, they say, what do you do a Malcolm? You're a professor of marketing. I say, yeah, yeah but I'm not. My job I say is to teach people how to make money and if they're already making money, my job is to teach them how to make even more money. So I'm not a professor of marketing; I'm a professor of money.

Joe: *When you're talking to key account management, and you're talking market segmentation and you're talking about kind of that behavior and people make decisions but within those contexts, I mean it's multiple, people are making decisions now, right? I mean there's not this one who used always to try to make the decision maker and figure how to do it but has that changed segmentation at all because we're talking people, we're selling to groups of people now, aren't we?*

Professor Malcolm: Yes, but not really because if you look at the research that was done -0- I can't remember, it was done in America is somewhere around 1963, it was called the 'buy grid' and you might remember that, but I still use that today in key account management where you take a company apart, and you go through the sales process and you say what kind of information does each one of those people need throughout that sales process. So you might have an influencer, a user, a decider, a gatekeeper – all those words that we know and love, but the point I make is that that is only one part of the key account management process. And incidentally, these things that came out of America, a lot of people have forgotten them. I haven't forgotten them; I still use them and help companies to make loads of profit by taking the best knowledge that we've had over the past 50 or 60 years, most of which has come out of America incidentally. But you take that buying part of it, there is another part of it which concerns how a company operates from one end to the other end and just think about Porter's Value Chain, you know when you get stuff coming in, and lots and lots of things happen to it and it goes out to the other end as a product or a service, now you take any organization in the States, particularly manufacturing organizations and you think how complex that process is. Now part of the key account management process is to get in there and understand every single part of each process from stuff coming in, raw materials coming in, to finish products going out, and then after sales service and work out what we as a supplier can do to either avoid costs, reduce costs or create value for the organization. And in the key account management book, there is quite a long, detailed description of how an organization should go about doing that because you take any of these organizations, they can buy stuff from anywhere Joe. They'll buy things however from organizations who really, really understand their needs, but they're actually going to be recommending things to them that the client or the customer hadn't even thought about because of the deep understanding of their processes. Now one of those processes is this buy grid thing and the people in there but it's only a part of it, Joe. Key account management is much, much more complex than that, and I've just highlighted two aspects of it, but I love it because when I'm running a workshop or something, I call it 'how to become the buyer, rather than the seller…' if you see what I mean.

Joe: *I get this feeling that you're not ready to retire soon.*

Professor Malcolm: Well I'm coming up 78 but I'm enjoying life too much, Joe. I'm enjoying life too much and as long as I've got something to say to these organizations, as long as they keep asking me, I'll keep going. And you know I go for a 2-mile run every morning. I come to the swimming pool, so I'm sitting by the swimming pool. I do a few lengths before the close of play. I've written 46 books, and I'm just writing some more but let me warn you, Joe, once you put one of my books down, you just can't pick it up. So if you suffer from insomnia, get a lot of my books. But I've got one book that we haven't even talked about, Marketing Plans has sold over half a million copies. It's translated into every language in the world, and it's how you put together a marketing plan. Now you now, strategic marketing plan.

Now, segmentation is the heart and soul of that. It comes at the beginning of segmentation, and then you'll go on, and you develop your strategies, and you do your book positioning and your branding and all that afterwards, and all of that goes into a marketing plan. But unless you get your segmentation right, the rest of it is going to be complete garbage because you're just saying, well we're going to do this, and we're going to do that, and here's our promotional plan, here's our branding plan. It doesn't work Joe. You got to get your segmentation right up front.

Joe: *I'd have to agree with you, but it's such a simple process that you outline. It seems so common sense when I'm done with it, and I want to compliment you on that because there's a lot of information in the book, in certain sections of it you'll force yourself through to read, I'll say that, okay?*

Professor Malcolm: I know, I know and I'm just about to start a simplified version of it Joe because my co-author Ian Dunbar, God bless him, he wanted to cross every 't' and dot every 'I', and it is too complicated, so you have my word and my promise that I will do a simple version of it.

Joe: *But when you step back and look at it, it's like 'Oh I get it…' and it's really simple to implement, where most books I read and they may be a better read but then at the end of it, well how do I do it?*

Professor Malcolm: That's right, yes, the marketing plans book, at the end of every chapter, you've got to do something. You actually have to do something. You end up with a plan. It's interesting, I've got a marketing planning course tomorrow at Cranfield. I'm an emeritus professor there, and this course has been running for 35 years. We have dated of course based on the latest research every year because we're lucky we get sponsored with research at Cranfield by nice companies like IBM and so on and so forth, so we keep ourselves up to date. This program has been running for 35 years; got a full complement of it. They come in; I start by talking about segmentation and then take them through the process. They then have to do some segmentation and at the end of the two days, they go away with a completed plan. But guess what comes up front? Market segmentation. It's mad, isn't it?

Joe: *When I'm listening to you, I'm connecting to all these different users and buyer personas, service-dominant logic, jobs to be done and all these things that are people are talking about now but how you describe it is the basis for all this. You segment by users.*

Professor Malcolm: Yes because a lot of companies get so sophisticated and so clever with digital and big data and God knows what. You cannot have a digital strategy, Joe, unless you've got a robust marketing strategy. It's complete and utter nonsense. You can't possibly have anything unless you got a robust needs-based marketing strategy. Companies often forget the basics. I always go back to basics. When I go to these companies, they start with their arms folded, after about 10 minutes, they've unfolded their arms, and they start making notes. It's interesting. A lot of the stuff that I teach and do goes way back to the early days of Philip Kotler and all those wonderful people. I know Philip quite well, incidentally, and he knows me. But you look a lot at Philip Kotler's stuff, still today Philip Kotler's book on marketing strategy is in every marketing manager's office throughout the world and fortunately, so is my marketing plans book. And increasingly, the market segmentation one is beginning to appear as well, but I do need to simplify it. I agree.

Joe: *I appreciate very much your time very much. I look forward to posting this and your new book. I think I have 3 on my shelf now.*

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