

Making Six Sigma Work **For** Marketing

2 Good Places to Start

Companies that have fully integrated Six Sigma into their regular marketing-decision processes report having great success in the following areas:

1. Process Mapping

Want to get 25% to 33% more accomplished with the same resources? That's about the norm for what most Six Sigma process-mapping exercises can lead to.

For most marketers, the very word "process" conjures up images of deathly boring navel analysis and lint extraction by committee. So don't use it. Think of it as "experience mapping," "value graphing," "frustration charts," or some other creative moniker. But whatever you call it, recognize that most of the people on your staff may never have taken the time to step back from their day-to-day execution to really draw out on a whiteboard exactly how things get done from start-to-finish.

How are local market campaigns executed? How are events planned and implemented? How are promotions moved from concept to market to assessment? Invariably, when they do they gain a whole new perspective on why some tasks are so frustrating, time-consuming, or unreliable.

Mapping the work process helps people see that there are, in fact, patterns buried in the seemingly random nature of the things they undertake each week. This pattern recognition helps break down the emotionally filtered perceptions of where time, money, and energy are misspent and forces a re-examination of just how they are adding value (or not) at each stage. In the end, process mapping shines a bright light on the value-detracting steps which slow you down, add cost, or prevent you from seeing the real opportunities. It illuminates the path to greater profitability or efficiency and draws your attention to things you can do NOW to have a big impact.

2. Voice of the Customer

At the very heart of Six Sigma lies an emphasis on ensuring that customer requirements are satisfied to the optimally profitable level. To do that, the company needs to know (by customer segment) what the requirements are, how well they are meeting them, and where the opportunities for improvement are.

While there are many "reactive" ways to gather this information (i.e. complaints, returns, credits, warranty claims, etc.), gaining a complete perspective requires some "proactive" initiatives like market research and customer/prospect interviews.

By leading the dialogue on how the voice of the customer is heard and measured throughout the organization, Marketing can ensure that customer-centric business decisions become the norm and inspire the organization to higher levels of challenge in producing better products and services. This in turn creates more opportunities for differentiation in brand marketing and better coordination through all owned and third-party sales channels.

Marketers who embrace what Six Sigma really stands for (growth, efficiency, and customer-centricity) see ways to use the tools and training to inspire new levels of creativity and innovation, while helping the rest of the company build and maintain more profitable customer relationships. CMOs who've gone through that initial "oh no, not in my department" phase will tell you that if you plan the implementation carefully and get off to a strong start, Six Sigma can take your marketing to heights of effectiveness and efficiency you've only been able to dream about up till now. 

