

Affinityworks



In October 2001, **Simon Trevor (Class of 2000)** and **Ross Macleod (Class of 1996)** established Affinityworks, a consultancy specialising in customer marketing and management. Drawing on their wealth of experience in the premium branded goods, financial and retail sectors, the core services offered by Affinityworks reflect their belief in realistic, viable business support. These also recognise the increasing value of skilled outsource facilities as a means for even the largest organisations to implement tasks quickly and efficiently.

At the heart of the Affinityworks business proposition is the shift from a traditional marketing focus on the four P's to a greater emphasis on customer-led requirements, developing efficient long-term relationships that meet client needs profitably, as explained in the ladder opposite. One year on, I invited the partners back to the Management School to update me on their latest projects and to find out what advice they might give to budding MBA entrepreneurs.

I began by asking them about the aspects of the MBA that they felt had proved particularly useful in setting up their own business. Simon highlighted the networking opportunities, not least for the fact that it was through a chance meeting at the Management School that he and Ross were first introduced. He also felt that the MBA was an excellent forum for discussing new business ideas. Ross endorsed Simon's view of networking, and picked up on the idea that "although the MBA doesn't necessarily

"If you believe in the business concept, then be single-minded and go for it!" Simon Trevor

make you a better manager, it makes you more aware of all the components that go together to form a business". He felt that insight into financial decision-making, for instance, had enabled them to allocate the partnership's investment in time and resources more effectively.

Affinityworks are currently involved in an exciting project with Dewar's, part of the Bacardi-Martini group. This involves harnessing customer information, building a database and organising for a range of marketing initiatives to develop profitable client relationships. At the heart of this process is the 'World of Whisky' visitor centre in Aberfeldy, providing an ideal platform to test and build direct contact with consumers. The partners are also involved in a workshop programme for business relationship managers of a major clearing bank. The initiative has already yielded both training and diagnostic benefits for future marketing.

CONSULTANCY SKILLS

Consultancy is of course a popular field for MBA graduates to enter, so I took the opportunity to ask the partners what qualities they felt were important for a successful consultant. In particular, Ross stressed the need for practicality. "It's fine to know all the 'management speak', but it's essential to achieve tangible benefits for the client." He also highlighted diplomacy as a key attribute, balancing the need to retain the trust of clients

"Practicality and diplomacy are key attributes for a consultant." Ross Macleod

whilst introducing new approaches. "It is easy to think that the views you have are more important than what's going on in the business," said Ross. "Nevertheless, with competition everywhere, an organisation has to adjust rapidly and keep looking forward. That's where the value of experienced practitioners can come in, helping with prompt, efficient deployment of projects."

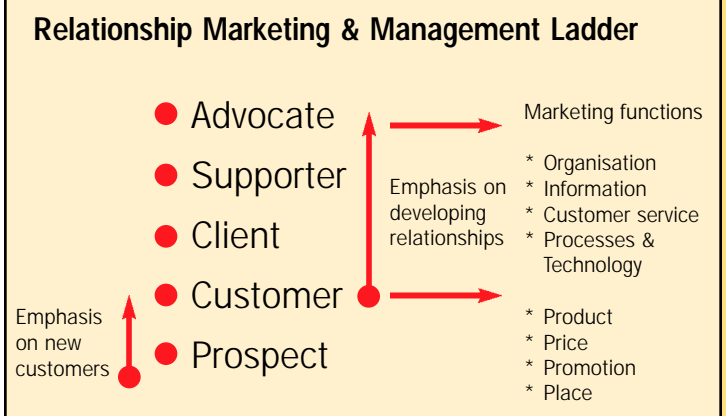
START UP ADVICE

Simon has the following advice for MBA graduates looking to follow in their footsteps. "If you believe in the business concept, then be single-minded and go for it!" He also added, "Don't be afraid to change things if something is slightly wrong." Ross agreed with Simon, and emphasised the need to ensure a balance between marketing the business and working on client initiatives. "There's a temptation to think that a lot of time working on projects means that everything is running well, but it probably means that insufficient time is being spent on developing contacts and finding the next assignment." From our discussions, Ross and Simon certainly seem to have a clear idea of the future direction of their company, and are both thoroughly enjoying the challenges of running their own business, not least for the fact that, as Simon said, "the benefit is that you are in charge of your own destiny."

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Relationship marketing is broadly at one end of a scale from transactional marketing. The latter is chiefly characterised by the four P's and has dominated marketing for over 40 years. The customer relationship management or CRM label has only entered into business management language in the last ten years, largely through the proliferation of software applications. There are currently over 5,000 companies around the world offering CRM systems 'solutions', yet these exhibit high failure rates on implementation. This occurs chiefly because technology has preceded business-led specifications.

The apparent novelty of relationship management to some organisations is nevertheless surprising given that it can be traced back to industrial marketing where client account management is evident, and prior to that in terms of the individual dialogue between craftsmen and their customers. The current interest in relationship management reflects the nature of the markets in which we currently operate - intense competition, high customer expectations, increase in channels (some of which are dictated by customers rather than businesses) and limited budgets. With shrinking margins, an adequate return on marketing spend can still be achieved where the trading relationship between business and purchaser is kept intact for as long as possible. Affinityworks' customer marketing services reflect this central concern, and are perhaps best illustrated by the Relationship Ladder below:



For more information on Affinityworks, please visit www.affinityworks.net.