

## **“If You Sell It, They Will Buy”** (*Business Builder* November 2, 2011)

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In the well-known movie “Field of Dreams,” the character played by Kevin Costner hears a voice telling him, “*If you build it, he will come.*” In the movie, “it” is a baseball diamond in the middle of an Iowa cornfield and “he” is the ghost of his father.

That expression is now widely quoted as, “***If you build it, they will come,***” and usually refers to the belief that a product or endeavor is so great, it needs no marketing support. Buyers will simply flock to it!

Here’s a real-life example:

I recently talked to an entrepreneur who wanted a marketing plan for importing a food item from Asia. More specifically, he wanted me to “get him on the shelves of supermarkets in America.”

- Had he done any homework on the market – what brands were already being sold, at what price points, by whom, and so on? Answer: “No, not necessary.”
- Had he done any testing of the product with consumers or retailers to get their reactions? Answer: “No.”

Now, this was an item which is considered pretty generic – even a commodity– by most U.S. consumers. And I knew that he would be up against some formidable competition for retail space. So I asked him why he thought he could be successful. “Once people taste it, they will love it and buy it,” he said.

***Pretty much along the lines of “If you build it, they will come.”***

Many entrepreneurs have this attitude. Unfortunately, in most cases they are wrong. A good, even great, idea does not guarantee success. Even the late Steve Jobs developed some products which were not runaway successes.

Most of us are not nearly the innovative genius that Jobs was. So we must work to maximize our probability of success in marketing our products and services. **This economy does not look kindly on entrepreneurs who think their offerings will sell themselves.** Certainly, no chain store buyer that I ever met would embrace a new item that has never been tested with consumers.

When I pointed this out to my would-be client and explained that developing a marketing plan would entail conducting some research, he balked. I never heard from him again. (I’ll keep an eye out in my local SuperFresh to see if his product hits the shelves, but I’m not holding my breath.)

**What kind of research did I suggest he do?**

- 1) Look at the market for his product category.
  - Where are these products being sold?
  - What is the distribution process?

- Sales of branded versus unbranded?
- In the case of branded products, what are the marketing messages?
- Can the market be segmented along the lines of price, retail outlets?

2) What are the best targets for his product?

- Best profit potential
- His ability to import enough product for that niche
- Costs of entry
- Likelihood of developing a significant point of difference versus competitors

3) Primary research

- Interviews with retailers
- Taste tests with end users

***This is Marketing 101, and you ignore it at your own peril:***

- You need to know your market and your business.
- You need to know your buyers and your end users.
- You need to demonstrate what makes your product or service different, superior and likely to be desired and purchased.

Today's business environment is no "Field of Dreams." Unless you are Kevin Costner, your marketing strategies must be well thought-out and grounded in reality.

***"If you sell it, they will buy"*** can be a reality, if you lay the groundwork for it.