



MARKETING STAR



Bryan Feller: Founder and President of Catalyst Performance Group

[By Anique Gonzalez]

Bryan Feller is a religious man. He attended college at a theological school where he studied to become a pastor. He turned to God during some of the most trying times in his career, which included the instances in which he “worked alongside a COO who threatened his life when he blew the whistle on corporate embezzlement; watched his hard work dissolve on September 11th, along with much of the U.S. economy; [and when working] for a major leadership development company, witnessed the toxic management one would liken to Enron.” This is why it is all the more amusing that Feller’s first true entry into the field of marketing was a result of feigned ignorance and a touch of dishonesty.

While studying at a small theological school after graduating high school, Feller began working in the shipping room of a training company. After nearly one year there, Feller concluded that the company could increase sales of their products if they offered them via a catalog, in addition to offering them at keynote and training events.

After informing his boss about the idea, Feller was tasked with writing the copy for the catalog. It was a huge success. “And when my boss and his boss got fired, the new guy thought I was the marketing manager. I just pretended like I was and kept working on marketing projects,” Feller says. With Feller serving as marketing manager, sales increased by \$3 million over the next few years.

Following this unique start, Feller went on to serve as marketing vice president for a leadership development company, general manager at a software company, and vice president of sales and marketing at a commercial furniture manufacturer and corporate events company. Along the way, Feller has achieved tremendous success, leading one company to the Inc. 500 list twice in five years, as well as growing a company’s revenue from near bankruptcy to \$20 million annually.

All of this success may, in part, be tied to Feller’s belief in disciplined marketing. “Marketing that is not based in the scientific method will ultimately fail over

the long term,” he states. According to Feller, too often, marketing executives create and execute campaigns without fully understanding customer behavior. While they do develop campaigns that are extremely creative, they do not connect with the customer, which should be the primary goal.

“Let’s face it; even in large consumer brand companies, you can test ad campaigns on statistically significant focus groups before

you roll them out and know if they are going to impact demand. Yet most companies never do. Instead, they rate the ad campaign on how well senior managers like it — people that are frequently out of touch with what consumers are really thinking.” So while creativity is important, knowing your customers and what they want, is the only way to achieve results.

“Creativity is great, but in a turnaround situation, you have to make every penny you put into marketing count. If you take a creative gamble and lose, everybody loses their jobs.”

Feller learned this customer-based and results-focused marketing style well. While working as the vice president of sales and marketing for furniture manufacturer Bertolini Inc., for instance, Feller theorized that the company could drastically improve sales by altering their marketing approach. To accomplish this, Feller created a direct mail experiment in contrast to the previously used direct response space ads with the belief that it would double and improve lead generation without generating significant marketing costs. Sales soon increased from \$8 million to \$16 million annually.

Building on this momentum Feller ventured out in 2005 and started his own marketing company, Catalyst Performance Group, which he now oversees as president. The company client list already includes the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, Charles

Q: What was the last piece of music that you listened to?

A: Jazz.

Q: Throughout your lifetime, what movie have you watched the most?

A: My kids watched *The Princess Bride* probably a hundred times while they were growing up. By default I think I probably saw it at least half of those times. [I] still think it is a cute movie.

Q: What was the last book you read?

A: *The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing*, Thomas Nagle. It was a little dry, but informative.

Q: What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

A: Butter Pecan.

Q: If you had an extra hour in the day, what would you spend it doing?

A: I’d pray more. I pray a lot, but not enough.



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Schwab, and the California Beach Volleyball Association, among others, and focuses on B2B marketing. Having already achieved a sizable amount of success thus far, Feller hopes to expand the agency by spinning off other companies in the future. "Catalyst is not a traditional ad agency — we actually use what we teach our clients to grow ourselves. We hope to do this with high potential start-ups in the future."

This approach, with an eye on results, growth, and above all else, the customer, will help Catalyst overcome the major challenges within the industry that are

beginning to present themselves. "I believe as time goes on it will be more difficult to communicate a value proposition to clients that is compelling and different. The old school branding tactics of plastering pithy slogans across mass media will simply cease to work," Feller says.

"Managers will demand more discipline from marketers, and at the same time, they will have to be better at innovation. Changing the rules to the game in commoditized markets will be the only way marketers will survive over the long term."

That is exactly what Feller intends to do.

ON THE NET

Catalyst Performance Group
www.catalystgroup.us/index.html

Bertolini Inc.
www.bertolinidirect.com

Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim
losangeles.angels.mlb.com/index.jsp?c_id=ana

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