



Editors and the Ps of Marketing

The buzzwords of marketers should stimulate editors to meet the needs of readers.

by Isaac Phiri

Two types of people vie for superiority in publishing—the editorial types, passionate about ideas and their impact on people, and marketing types, concerned about identifying what target audiences want and are willing to pay for. Frankly, I am in the earlier camp. What excites me about publishing is that we do not just peddle commodities or services but disseminate messages that transform individuals and societies.

Nonetheless, I have to admit that the Ps marketing types blab about make sense. There used to be five: *product*, *price*, *place*, *packaging* and *promotion*. But as you see in this issue of *InterLit*, the list now ranges anywhere from five to a dozen.

Let us pick, at random, some of these Ps. Do they have any redeemable value to the editorial function?

The *product*—the wry word marketers use in place of the books, magazines or other resources—must be of some relevance and value to the end user, or, more appropriately, the reader. We have to admit that marketers have a point. In thinking about ideas for books, magazines, curriculum and so on, we must keep the readers in mind. Why publish great works of little relevance to the needs (and wants) of readers?

Then there is the P we editing types find unpalatable, that is *price*. We like to focus on content and think less about pricing. On the other hand, marketers always talk about price. Can the readers afford it? Is the price competitive? Does the price cover all costs included in developing the resource? Again, we have to swallow our pride and agree that marketing types ask good questions.

The other big P marketers like to brandish is *packaging*. Essentially, how will this *good content* (my italics) authors and editors have developed be presented to end users. The research, thinking, organization and writing may be very good but if the book is

not put together in a way that makes it attractive to readers, it may never reach the audience it should. While designers play a key role in packaging publications, editors also contribute a lot. Effective titles, subtitles, call-outs, and captions all add to well packaged publications. The other traditional Ps in marketing are *place* and *promotion* (see page 9). The relevance of these to how we write and edit cannot be overemphasized.

More recently, marketers have unearthed what they think of as a “new” set of Ps. What is surprising is how old-fashioned (to writers and editors) the “new” Ps of marketing are. Take *perspective* (page 8). Marketers now say publishers must understand the perspective of the customers in order to produce resources that these customers will relate to. For marketers, this may be a “new” P but in writing and editing, it has been taught for generations. Good writing and editing takes into consideration the targeted reader’s perspective of the issue or topic.

Two other “new” Ps of marketing—*persuasion* and *passion*—are not new to writers and editors. Authors and editors seek to influence readers and to steer them in certain directions. This is why we value our work and put up resistance when marketers refer to our output as simply “products.” We refuse to see manuscripts and articles as mere consumables but as gems of *persuasion* brimming with *passion*.

The bottom line is effective publishing needs both marketing and editorial types. Editors should not be intimidated or irritated when marketers brandish the latest P. These Ps can help conceptualize, develop and deliver good editorial materials. In other words, editorial types (despite our obvious and well deserved superior status in the publishing industry) can become more effective communicators by looking closely at the Ps of marketing.❖