

The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing

by Al Ries and Jack Trout

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This book is the latest in a long line from the team of Al Ries and Jack Trout, whose other titles include Marketing Warfare, Positioning - The Battle for your Mind, and Bottom-Up Marketing . In this most recent book they argue that the market position of a product or service in the perception of the customer is everything, and offer up twenty-two “immutable” laws of marketing that to them demonstrate this fundamental point.

Their basic thesis is that “...to cope with the terrifying reality of being alone in the universe, people project themselves on the outside world. They “live” in the arena of books, movies, television, newspapers, magazines. They “belong” to clubs, organizations, and institutions. These outside representations of the world seem more real than the reality inside their own minds....

People cling firmly to the belief that reality is the world outside of the mind and that the individual is one small speck on a global spaceship. Actually it's the opposite. The only reality you can be sure about is in your own perceptions. If the universe exists, it exists inside your own mind and the minds of others. That's the reality that marketing programs must deal with...

Most marketing mistakes stem from the assumptions that you're fighting a product battle rooted in reality. All the laws in this book are derived from the exact opposite point of view.”

Their twenty-two ‘laws’ are:

1. The law of leadership - It is better to be first than it is to be better: “The basic issue in marketing in creating a category (i.e. a given type of product or service) you can be first in. It's the law of leadership. It's better to be first than it is to be better. It's much easier to get into the mind first than it is to try to convince someone you have a better product than the one that did get there first.”
2. The law of the category - If you can't be first in a category, set up a new category you can be first in.
3. The law of the mind - It's better to be first in the mind than to be first in the marketplace: “Is something wrong with the law of leadership (previously presented)? No, but the law of the mind modifies it. It is better to be first in the prospect's mind than first into the marketplace.... Being first in the mind is everything in marketing. Being first into the marketplace is important only to the extent that it allows you to get into the mind first.”
4. The law of perception - Marketing is not a battle of products; it's a battle of perceptions.
5. The law of focus - The most powerful concept in marketing is owning a word in the prospect's mind (i.e. the way that Coke ‘owns’ the word ‘cola’, or Xerox owns ‘copier’).
6. The law of exclusivity - Two companies cannot own the same word in the prospect's mind.
7. The law of the ladder - The strategy to use depends on which rung you occupy on the ladder - each category has its own ladder or hierarchy, and where your product or service is in this hierarchy will determine your strategic options.
8. The law of duality - In the long run, every market becomes a two-horse race.
9. The law of the opposite - If you're shooting for second place, your strategy is determined by the market leader.
10. The law of division - Over time, a category will divide and become two or more categories.

11. The law of perspective - Marketing effects take place over an extended period of time.
12. The law of line extension - There's an irresistible pressure to extend the equity of the brand: "One day a company is tightly focused on a single produce that is highly profitable. The next day the same company is spread thin over many products and is losing money."
13. The law of sacrifice - You have to give up something in order to get something: "The law of sacrifice is the opposite of the law of line extension. If you want to be successful today, you should give something up. There are three things to sacrifice: product line, target market, and constant change."
14. The law of attributes - For every attribute, there is an opposite effective attribute: "Marketing is a battle of ideas. So if you are to succeed, you must have an idea or attribute of your own to focus your efforts around. Without one, you had better have a low price. A very low price."
15. The law of candor - When you admit a negative, the prospect will give you a positive: "...it may come as a surprise to you that one of the most effective ways to get into a prospect's mind is to first admit a negative and then twist it into a positive."
16. The law of singularity - In each situation, only one move will produce substantial results.
17. The law of unpredictability - Unless you write your competitor's plans, you can't predict the future.
18. The law of success - Success often leads to arrogance, and arrogance to failure.
19. The law of failure - Failure is to be expected and accepted.
20. The law of hype - The situation is often the opposite of the way it appears in the press: "When things are going well, a company doesn't need the hype. When you need the hype, it usually means you're in trouble."
21. The law of acceleration - Successful programs are not built on fads, they're built on trends.
22. The law of resources - Without adequate funding, an idea won't get off the ground: "Marketing is a game fought in the mind of the prospect. You need money to get into a mind. And you need money to stay in the mind once you get there."

The book makes intriguing reading, despite the fact that it contains nothing startlingly new. Part of what makes it interesting is its counter-intuitive, contrarian stance on certain issues (for example the notion that product attributes don't matter in and of themselves, and that it is essentially the position of the product in the mind of the consumer that is the important thing). However, with twenty-two 'laws', there is something to cover just about every situation imaginable, so the book seems more prescient than it actually is. (In fact, given the fact that there are counter-examples to just about every rule presented by the authors, perhaps the only immutable law of marketing is that there are no immutable laws of marketing!)