

MARKETING CRYONICS

By David Pascal



*When it comes to successfully
marketing cryonics,
David Pascal has a bright idea:*

Think inside the box

How can we get a better response to cryonics from the public? Clearly our existing efforts have not been a success. The numbers speak for themselves. There's been over forty years of media coverage and press attention. And the result? Barely more than a thousand people signed up and funded for cryopreservation. Each year cigarettes, illegal drugs, and pop tunes sell in the billions. Cryonics memberships sell in the dozens. More media attention has been lavished on cryonics than on Madonna. Yet almost no one seems to want it.

Why? Advocates of cryonics speculate that we seem hard-wired by evolution to crave self-termination or that we live in a culture of death. Of course these are myths; no 'death gene' has ever been found, and our 'culture of death' spends billions each month on medical care and longevity enhancement.

But perhaps the most crippling myth is that we have done all we can to sell cryonics. Our marketing efforts have failed, and so any marketing efforts will always fail. This is a bit like saying that since if you try to hop to the moon in one mighty bound, but only rise a few feet, then rockets can never reach the moon either.

But rockets *have* reached the moon. And well-funded, carefully-researched, thoughtfully-designed marketing efforts have gained worldwide popularity for innumerable products. Professional marketing expertise *can* help. That's why every major firm in existence engages in marketing. Because, done right, it works.

But how *do* professionals do it properly? What is marketing? How does it really function? And how might we successfully apply it to cryonics?

The Marketing Process

The first step in understanding marketing is to put aside misunderstandings.

First of all: marketing is not advertising. It is not about getting press attention or media coverage or even about better public relations. Yes, those things are sometimes – not always – elements in a marketing campaign. But the *core* of marketing lies in specialized processes of information-gathering, and in using that information to shape what one offers to the market, and how one presents that offer.

It isn't about presenting something *you* want and promoting the reasons that you want it. It's about asking the public what *they* want, and providing and presenting it in ways that *they* respond to.

Marketing is a kind of creative empathy. And it is through such creative empathy – professionally structured and applied – that the challenge of building memberships and gaining public approval can be found. Provided we have the will and discipline to seek it.

How is professional marketing structured and applied? Essentially it involves six steps. The first step is defining your goals. And in business, goals are best achieved the more tightly they are focused. It isn't always a matter of pursuing growth in every sense and every way. Rolls-Royce, aimed at a tiny niche market, is a thriving success. The Edsel and the Yugo, aimed at mass sales, are out of business. Does an organization want more customers or more income? Does it want prestige or notoriety? Either can be achieved, but the first step involves vision: what and where specifically do you want your organization to be?

Answering that question shapes what the research goals should be. And once the research goals are set, marketers gather as much relevant information as they can about the consumers they're targeting. Common tools are surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and covert or direct observation.

Sample markets need not be huge – Gallup Polls of nationwide accuracy require no more than 1500 people. But that population must be carefully balanced and selected. Fifteen hundred individuals at random attending a Billy Graham rally, or kinder-

garten, will not be representative. Once a representative sample is determined and explored, however, something priceless results: hard data about that target market's likes, dislikes, concerns, preferences – all the relevant factors that go into their behavior as a consumer.

The next step? Marketers apply that information to shaping or packaging the product in a way that satisfies consumer criteria for making a purchase. This step is critical. Again, and contrary to rumor, marketers do *not* ram unwanted products onto the public through relentless repetition. It is far safer, easier, and more effective simply to find out the consumers' preferences, and then create or present products that satisfy those preferences.

When an appealing product or approach is crafted in this way, and when tests show samples of the public responding positively, then mass promotional approaches are added. This is where advertising often comes in. Although alternative means of promotion are common too, such as word-of-mouth marketing, telemarketing, direct sales, 'stealth' or viral marketing, and other approaches.

Once this carefully-designed product is presented to the public, the fifth step begins: monitoring the reaction of the market and getting feedback.

And the last step? The last step involves incorporating that feedback, looping it back into the beginning of the process, and going through the whole process again, so that the product is continually being upgraded and re-

configured to mesh as tightly as possible with consumer preferences.

That's why the process is so powerful. It doesn't push things people don't want. It finds out what they *do* want and then gives it to them. Resisting good marketing means resisting the things you most desire. Very few people can do that. Very few want to.

And what particularly makes it powerful is the fact that it is not rooted in speculation, but in hard data. It's easy enough to sit around a table and express one's gut feeling as to what the market may want. But an expressive gut is not a marketing tool. Market researchers do not speculate. They gather data until they can make statistically valid predictions about public tastes and public behavior.

Learning How to Listen

Could we apply this process to cryonics? Certainly. And I strongly encourage the existing cryonics organizations to give it a try. A statistically valid study of public reactions to cryonics could be done easily enough through a competent marketing research firm. I personally would suggest an extensive in-depth professional study examining everything from the packaging, pricing and services the public might like in this area, to more subtle approaches such as psychographic and segmentation analysis.

Gathering the data will be challenging. But it will be rewarding. Because all we know now for sure is that the existing approaches have not worked. They haven't worked because we've been presenting cryonics to people in a way that doesn't appeal to them. We need to find out exactly why it doesn't appeal, and we need to find out what does. If all we do repeat what doesn't work, all we'll get is the same results.

Numbers and Depths

Suppose that Alcor considered offering some form of DNA testing to the public as part of its business service. Or suppose that it considered opening a Toronto facility. These are closely focused, specific questions. Once such questions have been developed, simple polling or data gathering can provide information that would help Alcor make a better business decision. This is the function of what is called quantitative marketing research.



Marketing is the systematic discovery of what the market wants and how the market likes to be approached based on qualitative and/or quantitative market research. It then shapes and re-shapes the product and/or its presentation until those wants are satisfied.

Other marketing questions are wider and more open-ended. “Why do people join or leave?” “What kind of visual imagery might be most effective?” “How can we get more people to sign up?” And then there’s the most challenging question of all – “Which questions are the best ones to ask?” Because the fact is that you often have to study the market before you can even frame the right questions.

This area involves qualitative, or exploratory, research. Good qualitative research probes deeper market preferences. The questions used in quantitative research ideally develop from qualitative research, and that’s where good marketing really begins.

I suspect this will especially be the case with cryonics. You see, few people realize that casual information-gathering often misleads more than it informs. Consumers often don’t really know what motivates them to buy, and the reasons they give when they’re asked have little – although not nothing – to do with it.

Political marketers know this well. In interviews and focus groups, respondents often select the more politically correct candidate because that’s the choice that’s socially approved. Yet once in the ballot box, votes go to the hard-liner who calls for criminals to hang.

This isn’t simple hypocrisy. People’s reports about themselves are honest ones. Respondents really do believe that health food is healthy and junk food is junk. Unfortunately, they go out and buy the junk food anyway. And marketing is concerned with what they do, not what they say.

How does this affect cryonics? Greatly. Simply put, the rational case has failed. Cryonicists have made a very rational case for decades, and the case could not be stronger. If cryonics works, you live – perhaps for a very, very long time. If it doesn’t, you remain no deader than you would have been otherwise. It is an affordable choice between potentially tremendous gain and nothing to lose. Yet, the choice has almost invariably been against cryonics.

Many of us have experienced this, I’m sure, in talks with people. Objections no sooner come up than we shoot them down. *‘No reputable scientist supports cryonics.’* Drexler, Minsky, Merkle, Fahy, Wowk, de Grey, Harris.

‘It’s too expensive.’ Insurance can make cryopreservation as affordable as cable. *‘You can’t raise the dead.’* What about the thousands who’ve died on operating tables and been revived? The embryos that have been frozen, implanted, and brought to term?

Each objection has an answer. And when all the objections are answered – the listener still creeps away. Clearly there are aversions to cryonics that have nothing to do with the reasons given.

The reasons given are certainly not irrelevant, and the practice of educating the public is certainly very important. Advertising icon David Ogilvy nailed this perfectly when he said that buyers have a very deep need for rational reasons – to justify the irrational urges that *really* drive their choices.

Can marketing techniques unearth those deeper, less obvious reasons? Of course. Entire branches are devoted precisely to uncovering visceral and unconscious reactions. Marketing analysts such as Harvard’s Dr. Gerald Zaltmann¹ and France’s Dr. Clotaire Rappaille² regularly – and successfully – employ projective psychological techniques to probe such factors for leading Fortune 500 companies.

What might such factors be in cryonics? They may well be related to subjective fears involving helplessness and dependency while in a vulnerable state. Or fears of social condemnation. Or the result of childhood phobias relating to fears of defying God or the ‘natural order of things.’ Or quite probably something which we don’t, at the moment, even suspect. Which reasons are central? How can they best be addressed? You simply don’t know until you do the research.

But one thing we *do* know: the explicit responses people give in focus groups and questionnaires are not clearly reflected in their subsequent behavior. Those responses matter; they are a critical part of shaping or justifying that behavior. But they don’t always predict it or explain it. In the case of cryonics a depth approach will almost certainly be necessary.

Social Psychology

Semi-rational factors explored by both qualitative and quantitative research are part of the discipline of social psychology. Academic researchers from Stanley Milgram³ to



To choose cryonics is often to stand alone – and to face the social criticism that accrues to anyone who does something outside the ordinary. Social psychology predicts that very few people indeed will take such a singular option. And the history of cryonics confirms it.

Robert Cialdini⁴ have shown decisively that many of our most important choices are made simply because of social influence. We see similar others making a choice and we make the same choice. Humans are an imitative species, deeply predisposed to group pressure and peer influence. And I suspect this has affected the acceptance of cryonics profoundly.

Cryonics members are rare. Many of them are isolated or anonymous. Few advertise their affiliation. Fewer still are household names known to the common man. The vast majority of potential cryonics members don’t know, see, or associate with anyone who has chosen the cryonics option.

Fortunately, marketing problems tend to contain the clues to their solution. I once suggested to more than one cryonics organization that it write a letter to every agent in the entertainment and arts industries, pointing out the media attention likely to follow their famous client should that client sign up for cryonics. Would it be possible to persuade a publicity agent that if publicity at any price is good, worldwide publicity for the price of an Alcor membership would be a good bargain indeed? I think so. If Qaballah can get Madonna in the papers for months, why can’t cryonics?

Behind the suggestion lies marketing practice and social-psychological principle. Research in both areas shows that people will do what they see others doing. Most Americans are not moved by Eric Drexler’s or Mar-

vin Minsky's choice for cryonics because most Americans do not know who these worthy gentlemen are. If they saw a Tom Hanks, a Danny De Vito, a Tiger Woods opting for cryopreservation and liking it, would they be more inclined to sign too? The studies predict yes.

Or consider families. One reason the growth of family memberships in cryonics is on the rise is that children and spouses and siblings see significant, similar, respected others making the choice for cryonics. They see others do it, and so they make the same choice. The more families join, the more the effect spreads. And marketing policies can be shaped to encourage this and to encourage it in other social networks, possibly with social networks with compatible outlooks such as transhumanists, extropians and other futurists.

Another social psychology principle is cognitive dissonance. Get people supporting an idea intellectually, even without commitment, and commitment follows. People who are asked to make a positive case for something end up convincing themselves.

One marketing idea along these lines might be to blanket as many universities as possible with the annual offer of a thousand dollars in scholarship funds for a winning essay about why one should sign up for cryonics. The organization would look good for supporting education; students would benefit; and many of them would be thinking and arguing strongly in favor of cryonics membership. Theory and practice suggest memberships would burgeon.

Science and the Science of Marketing

Marketing cryonics can be a frustrating business. Perhaps understandably. Existing cryonics organizations are not marketing

firms. They have many other duties to perform, and many other services to provide.

But the value of a specialist organization focused on such efforts is obvious. To that end, in late 2005 publisher and direct mail specialist Nick Pavlica, Canadian attorney Bruce Waugh, and I formed a nonprofit organization called the Cryonics Society (www.cryonicsociety.org) to do just that – put a polished professional case for cryonics before the public.

So far the Society has already put a positive message about cryonics before hundreds of thousands of people. And it has not been easy to do. The Cryonics Society is not affiliated or supported by any cryonics services organization. The only support we get comes from tax-deductible contributions by people in the cryonics community. What we can do in the future depends totally on how much support people give us today. But to the degree that the Society has already raised awareness of cryonics and the need to market it better, our efforts have been well spent.

And what should we be *most* aware of? That ways to make cryonics more acceptable to the public are *there* and that there are proven methods to find them. Cryonics *can* be made appealing, attractive, desirable, even popular. If pet rocks and tobacco and bungee jumping can be sold, cryonics can too. It is simply a matter of studying the market and finding the key.

I have always been surprised at the way advocates of cryonics champion science, analysis, and the use of qualified professionals in technical research – yet rely on luck, intuition, and guesswork when it comes to marketing. When we learn to apply the same professional rigor to social research that we apply to cryobiological research, we will take a giant step towards making cryonics a reality. ■



Photo by John Retallack

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More information about the Cryonics Society is available online at www.CryonicsSociety.org.

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