

by Bill Gallagher Ph.D.

Many years ago, the huge Ford Motor Company made a huge marketing goof. The goof was so enormous that even though you may not have been alive at the time, chances are you remember hearing about the infamous Edsel. Let's look at what happened.

Many people think that the car bombed because of its design. Not so. While the central design theme was somewhat bizarre, the car looked a bit as if it were some kind of giant fish sucking on a lemon; the look wasn't the source of the debacle. It was the marketing.

As the story goes, from the CEO's office down came the word, "We want a car with something for everyone, the Edsel." Obediently, marketing ordered lots of models with lots of prices. Over twenty models were designed, including the specialty issues. Four-door sedans to racy sports models, each sucking that lemon, and all headed for disaster.

Something for everyone, lots of models, with lots of prices spells a very big marketing mistake.

Let's contrast this gloom and doom with a success story. A Ford success, a huge Ford success. Did I say huge? Bigger than huge, enormous, gigantic, and years later, still going. Major huge. Mega big. This is a marketing blockbuster. I speak, of course, of the Mustang.

The success was due to a tightly focused sales campaign, what we call today "target marketing."

The defined or targeted market was, 1. "young," meaning 20 to 30, and 2. "second family car," meaning 30 to 50. The model was positioned as "easy to handle" and "uncomplicated." As a consequence, everyone knew what a Mustang was and who was supposed to buy it. They did, in droves.

Mustang's popularity started with a very narrowly focused target market, the young and the "young at heart." The car was designed for the wants and needs of this market alone. They knew that this market wanted an uncomplicated car that was "easy to handle."

Some of you may recall that a few years after the initial offering, the Ford management decided to widen the Mustang offering. Now it was pitched as a luxury offering and four-door models appeared. Sales, of course, dipped.

Loss of targeted marketing focus usually means a loss in sales. We in smaller businesses must learn lessons from the big guys. They can afford to make mistakes here and there and with their giant resources can recover. But we can't. Coke can lose millions on a mis-focused "New Coke." Who wanted it? What was its target? A similar mis-calculation will put most of into

Chapter 11.

A final word or so, find out who wants or needs your products or services the most. Set up all your efforts to that small slice of North America. Later you can target another market segment.