

unplug your system and to pack it up just like it was when you got it. Then I want you to take it back to the store you bought it from.

C: Really? Is it that bad?

O: Yes, I'm afraid it is.

C: Well, all right then, I suppose. What do I tell them?

O: Tell them you're too stupid to own a computer.

2.6 Case study Cybertartan Software

1:27

Interviewer: So, Laurie, these recruitment and turnover problems we're having – is it just a question of money?

Laurie McAllister: Well of course salaries are not terribly attractive these days. They were quite good a few years ago when the centre opened, but they haven't really increased with the cost of living, especially now house prices are so expensive here, so we're finding it more difficult to attract people from outside the area. But, actually, salaries are not the biggest problem. Basically there are two reasons why our turnover is high: working conditions and job satisfaction.

I: I see. What's the matter with working conditions? We give them free coffee, don't we?

LM: Well, things are very different now from when we started. In the past, the volume of calls was much lower, so things were more relaxed. Advisers had time to chat or have a cigarette between two calls. Now, the workload is much heavier, and the supervisors have to be very strict about breaks. Two bathroom breaks per day, and twenty minutes for lunch. There's a lot of unhappiness about that. And punctuality, well, the bus service here is totally inadequate. A lot of advisers can't afford a car, so transport is a real problem, especially at night.

I: Yes, I can see why that's a problem.

LM: And there are little things, you know, like having your own personal space. When you share your desk with your colleagues on the other shifts, you can't really personalize anything.

I: Hm. Maybe there are things that can be improved there. What's the problem with job satisfaction?

LM: Time, mostly. Our software products have become so complex that customers need more and more help. There are more calls than we can answer, so advisers have to keep them as short as possible. That's frustrating because there isn't time to build a relationship with the customer; sometimes there isn't even time to explain the solution properly. And then of course they say if they can't spend longer on the phone, they would like to send out instructions by email.

I: Yes, well, the customers would like that too, but we can't charge them for it like we can phone calls!

LM: Exactly. And we really need to give the advisers more training, especially the new people, but there just isn't time. They often have to read out instructions from the manual; it's not much fun answering questions when you don't really understand the answers yourself!

I: No, I can see that.

LM: Of course the thing they really don't like is the shift system. They work one week in

the morning, from 6am to 2pm, one week in the afternoon from 2pm to 10pm, and one week nights, 10pm to 6am. I mean, it's OK for young, single people, but it's impossible for women with children, so that's a whole category of the population we have virtually no chance of employing. And some people actually like working nights, so they would happily swap their day shifts with other colleagues who don't want to work nights – but the company won't let them. It's company policy, but it's too rigid, it's just not realistic ... Anyway, perhaps you should talk to the advisers themselves – get it straight from the horse's mouth, as they say.

3 Products and packaging

3.1 About business Packaging

1:28

Interviewer: Mr. Wang, you often say that packaging is 'the manufacturer's last chance to seduce the customer.' Why is that?

Wang: Yes. In today's highly competitive marketplace, many products are almost identical. So branding is not enough. That's especially true here in Asia, where there may be literally hundreds of competitors making the same product in the same city. You have to differentiate; you have to communicate the difference which makes your product a better choice. I agree with Jack Trout when he says, 'Every aspect of your communications should reflect your difference. The bottom line is: you can't overcommunicate your difference.'

I: So, packaging is the best way to communicate your difference?

W: Exactly. You know, 75% of purchasing decisions are made at the point of sale. And because most stores are self-service, your product is alone on the shelf, surrounded by its competitors. According to Wal-Mart – and they're the world's largest retailer, so they should know! – your product has to pitch its promise to the customer in three seconds or less, from up to fifteen feet away. If your packaging is not attractive, effective and distinctive, how are you going to communicate its difference?

I: OK, so packaging is critical, and manufacturers spend millions of dollars on it. So why are there so many failures?

W: The big problem is a lack of communication. Typically there are several different groups of experts, all working in their own specialized field: market research people who know nothing about design, designers who know nothing about manufacturing, and production people who know nothing about consumer needs. Traditionally, you keep your design team well away from business and manufacturing constraints because you don't want to limit their creativity. Unfortunately, the result is inevitably a compromise. You start out with an original, creative idea, but then you find out it's impractical, for reasons of cost or technical limitations. So, it gets watered down, simplified, adapted. In the end, you are left with a package which is easy to make, easy to transport and within budget, but it's no longer what the consumer wanted! So, you get focus groups where

consumers don't really like any of the concepts that are presented. That means, either you start all over again, or you have to choose the least unpopular option!

I: How do you avoid this problem at New China Packaging?

W: Well, basically, what we do is build what we call a 'task force'. This is a cross-functional team with people from all the different departments involved in the project. We put them all together in a hotel, with all the tools they need to produce mockups and prototypes. Then we literally lock the door and we don't let them out until they produce something that everybody is enthusiastic about!

I: And do you include consumers in the task force?

W: Yes, indeed. We need the end user's input right from the beginning. Everything is consumer-led. And, because we know that what consumers say they need and what they really need are frequently two different things, we also observe them using the product. Frequently, we can detect behaviours and needs that the consumer is not even conscious of.

I: Really? Uh-huh. So, who else is involved?

W: Marketing, manufacturing, designers, consultants – everyone who has a stake in the product.

I: And how long does the process take?

W: Traditionally, months or sometimes years. But today, our task forces can usually deliver an optimal solution in one week, sometimes less. And remember, when they deliver, every aspect of the package is consumer-validated, realistic and feasible. So, this extremely short turn-around means that the manufacturer can react very, very quickly to changes in the market, almost in real time.

3.2 Vocabulary Specifications and features

1:29–1:34

1

A: I want to listen to English while I go jogging. Is that possible?

B: Oh, yeah. Jogging, cycling, skiing ... whatever you like. Nothing can stop it. I even dropped mine down two flights of stairs, and when I picked it up, it was still working.

2

C: I hear you bought one of those new robots. What do you think of it?

D: It's fantastic! I used to spend hours cleaning the flat. Now I can just program the robot and sit back and watch it work.

C: That's incredible! I must get one ...

3

E: I really like the colour. It's a beautiful car!

F: Yes, and it's an interesting shape too. Quite unusual. Very different from other cars in this category, isn't it?

4

G: Mom, what's in this bottle? I can't open it!

H: Give that to me, dear. You mustn't touch that. It's for cleaning the kitchen, and it's dangerous. Fortunately, they put it in a special bottle that children can't open ...

5

I: Quick, it's starting to rain and there's a pallet of those electronic toys outside!

J: OK, I'll move it straight away. But don't worry – the boxes are made of special paperboard. A little rain won't do any damage.