

Chapter 1 : Distribution Channels in Marketing | Marketing MO

The Manager's Guide to Distribution Channels examines how today's most innovative corporations are literally rewriting the rules for channel management and redesigning their distribution strategies to take full advantage of ongoing technological and operational innovations.

Distribution Channels - Meaning and Their Significance Distribution Channels - Meaning and Their Significance Various marketing intermediaries are used in transferring the products from the hands of producers to the final consumers or industrial users. These marketing intermediaries carry alternate names such as wholesalers, distributors, retailers, franchised dealers, jobbers, authorised dealers and agents. Such marketing intermediaries comprise the distribution channel. These distribution channels minimize the gap between point of production and point of consumption, and thereby create place, time and possession utilities. They have various contacts, expertise and wider knowledge of the products. The rapidly growing markets and increasing complexities of distribution have increased the demand and requirement of the distribution channels. The role of distribution channels can be summarised as follows: **Distribution channels offer salesmanship:** The distribution channels offer pivotal role of a sales agent. They help in creating new products in market. They specialize in word of mouth selling and promotion of products. They assure pre-sale and post-sale service to the consumers. Since these channels are in direct and regular contact with the consumers, they do salesmanship very well and at the same time provide true and valuable feedback to the producers. **Distribution channels increase distributional efficiency:** The intermediary channels ease the sales process as they are in direct contact with the customers. They narrow down the gap between producers and consumers both economically and efficiently. These intermediaries reduce the number of transactions involved in making products available from producers to consumers. For instance, there are four producers who are targeting to sell their products to four customers. If there is no distribution channel involved, then there will be sixteen transactions involved. But if the producers use distribution channels, then the number of transactions involved will be reduced to eight four from producer to intermediary and four from intermediary to customer , and thereby the transportation costs and efforts will also be reduced. **The channels offer products in required assortments:** Just like the producers have expertise in manufacturing products, similarly the intermediaries have their own expertise. The wholesalers specialize in moving and transferring products from various producers to greater number of retailers. Similarly, the retailers have expertise in selling a wide assortment of goods in less quantity to a greater number of final customers. Due to the presence of distribution channels wholesalers and retailers , it is possible for a consumer to buy the required products at right time from a store conveniently located geographically closer rather than ordering from a far located factory. Thus, these intermediaries break the bulk and meet the less quantity demand of the customers. They assist in product merchandising: When a customer goes to a retail shop, he may be fascinated by the attractive display of some new product, may get curious about that new product, and he may switch over to that new product leaving his regular product. Thus merchandising activities of the intermediaries serve as a quiet seller at a retail store. **The channels assist in executing the price mechanism between the firm and the final customers:** The intermediaries help in reaching a price level which is acceptable both to the producers as well to the consumers. **Distribution channels assist in stock holding:** The intermediaries perform various other functions like financing the products, storing the products, bearing of risks and providing required warehouse space. They assist in expanding product reach and availability, as well in increasing revenue.

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Sales, marketing, warehouse and production managers often pursue conflicting tactics that are misaligned with the overall corporate objective. Distribution channel managers consider the unique dynamics of each department involved in the supply chain and design plans to improve communication among departments. An effectively functioning distribution management structure facilitates cooperative efforts among channel participants. This results in lower operational costs while improving the customer service experience. Job Responsibilities At the core of their responsibilities, distribution managers scrutinize existing aspects of the supply chain while planning and offering directives for new initiatives. The actual movement of goods from manufacturer to buyer is called logistics, and involves several independent departments. This includes direct channels such as facilities, warehousing, production and the sales force, as well as indirect channels and third party distributors who contribute to supplying products to customers. Distribution managers also facilitate cooperation between downstream partners included in the delivery of products to the end user, as well as upstream partners that include suppliers and vendors. Coordinating shipments requires organizing delivery routes, properly loading freight and determining the placement of resources that will result in the most efficient delivery of goods. Shipments must be monitored to ensure they reach their destination at the appropriate time. Incoming shipments require scheduling to meet the needs of production and require close monitoring as well. This may involve the implementation of enhanced inventory tracking systems, establishment of minimum and maximum purchasing triggers and hiring and organizing a staff of purchasing agents. Managers will also develop detailed reports that offer quantifiable data to assist the sales, marketing and production departments. Logistics processing involves the careful planning of transportation requirements, warehousing, forecasting, processing orders, controlling inventory, physical facilities management and customer service. The goal is to minimize operational expenses and capital investments while achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction. Training and Education Requirements The career path to becoming a distribution channel manager is varied and does not have specific educational requirements. Many managers began their careers in either purchasing or warehousing. A purchasing agent has continual interaction with numerous vendors on a daily basis. This provides valuable insight into the challenges presented when suppliers fail to meet production schedules and materials are not delivered to customers when promised. Warehouse and inventory experience affords front line interaction with the sales force and the purchasing department, offering a unique insight into the sometimes conflicting dynamics which motivates the actions of these divisions. Companies with sophisticated logistics requirements usually prefer to hire degreed applicants. Formal education will enhance the opportunity for placement and more rapid advancement. Distribution Management programs cover transportation dynamics, warehouse logistics, core management functions, purchasing matrix theory and using data bases and spreadsheets. Entry level jobs for those with a degree in Logistics and Distribution include inventory control manager, distribution center manager, transportation manager, planning analyst and customer service manager. Since a distribution channel management career requires a great deal of interpersonal interaction, those entering the profession should have developed good communications skills along with the ability to recognize departmental issues within the context of a broad systems perspective. A position in distribution channel management can often lead to promotion opportunities. In their regular capacity, distribution managers interact regularly with every department within the company. This exposure provides a unique platform for potential advancement. As a result, those who seek to further their careers often obtain an MBA through continuing education. Distribution Channel Management Salary and Wages The salary and wages for a distribution channel management professional are dependent on the geographic location, the size of the company acquiring the manager and the educational level of the applicant. These figures do not include retirement and healthcare benefits. The Occupational Information Network indicates that the number of available distribution management jobs will remain tight through the end of the

decade with relatively flat growth. This program tests to verify comprehension of logistics and supply chain management concepts. Professional Associations Numerous industry specific associations focus on distribution training and education. The National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors NAW encompasses every industry and offers a wide array of programs designed to educate and inform members as to the emerging challenges in supply chain management. NAW also provides lobbying on behalf of the industry as well as insurance programs to help companies reduce and manage those expenses.

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Here are three examples of distribution channels in marketing: You have a second product line for small businesses. Instead of using your sales team, you sell this line directly to end-users through your website and marketing campaigns. You have two markets and two distribution channels. You sell a product through a geographical network of dealers who sell to end-users in their areas. The dealers may service the product as well. Your dealers are essentially your customers, and you have a strong program to train and support them with marketing campaigns and materials. You sell a product to a company who bundles it with services or other products and resells it. A VAR may work with an end-user to determine the right products and configurations, and then implement a system that includes your product. To create a good distribution program, focus on the needs of your end-users. If users need personalized service, you can utilize a local dealer network or reseller program to provide that service. If your users prefer to buy online, you can create an e-commerce website and fulfillment system and sell direct; you can also sell to another online retailer or distributor that can offer your product on their own sites. You can build your own specialized sales team to prospect and close deals directly with customers. Wholesalers, resellers, retailers, consultants and agents already have resources and relationships to quickly bring your product to market. Your end-users get the information and service they need before and after the sale. Your current system may also be difficult to manage. Access detailed step-by-step plans in our new marketing website. Evaluate how your end-users need to buy Your distribution strategy should deliver the information and service your prospects need. For each customer segment, consider: How and where they prefer to buy Whether they need personalized education and training Whether they need additional products or services to be used along with yours Whether your product needs to be customized or installed Whether your product needs to be serviced Match end-user needs to a distribution strategy If your end-users need a great deal of information and service, your company can deliver it directly through a sales force. You can also build a channel of qualified resellers or consultants. The size of the market and your price will probably dictate which scenario is best. You may also use an inbound telemarketing group or a field sales team. Identify natural partners If you want to grow beyond the direct model, look for companies that have relationships with your end-users. Establish goals, service requirements and reporting requirements. Run promotions and programs to support the partner and help them increase sales. Minimize pricing conflicts If you use multiple channels, carefully map out the price for each step in your channel and include a fair profit for each type of partner. Then compare the price that the end-user will pay; if a customer can buy from one channel at a lower price than from another, your partners will rightfully have concerns. Pricing conflict is common, and it can jeopardize your entire strategy, so do your best to map out the price at each step and develop the best solution possible. For example, provide them with marketing funds or materials to promote your products; run campaigns to generate leads and forward them to your partners. When your channel is up and running, you can start launching marketing campaigns to channel partners and end-users.

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