

## The Tale of Little Blue Widgets (A Story about Consumers and Producers)

A large national retailer, Super-Duper Mart, decided that it wanted to offer little blue widgets to its customers. “What is a little blue widget?” you ask. I leave it to your imagination! This is a story about producers and consumers, not necessarily about the product being offered.

In order for the public to know about little blue widgets, Super-Duper Mart ran Ads in the communities where its stores were located. The retailer used Broadcast TV, radio and print advertising. The Ads were brief, but colorful. Through image and sound, Super-Duper Mart offered an invitation to potential customers to come into its stores and see the little blue widgets for themselves. The Ads ran in the various media for several weeks.

Meanwhile, while the Ads were running in the media, Super-Duper Mart was getting ready to receive all the people who might come in to see little blue widgets for themselves. This involved making sure the manufacturer of little blue widgets was producing enough of them to have in each of Super-Duper’s stores. Super-Duper Mart also checked to make sure that regional suppliers could handle the demand for little blue widgets from each store location. It also had to make sure that shippers and truckers could deliver them to the retailer’s stores in a timely fashion. Stock clerks, line workers, display workers, cashiers and other store personnel had to be made aware of the little blue widget promotion and sale. Nothing could be worse than a customer coming to one of Super-Duper’s stores and asking to see little blue widgets and being told by an employee that he or she knew nothing about them! So managers on each shift – its stores were always open! – Explained carefully what the little blue widget was, when the promotion was to start, where the item was located in the store and how much it cost. They did this so that no one looking for a little blue widget would have to wonder if they’d come to the right place.

Well, sure enough, people started coming to Super-Duper Mart in search of little blue widgets! And they found them in abundance! Little blue widgets went flying off the shelves and everyone at Super Duper Mart felt they had a part to play in the success of the little blue widget promotion.

As I said earlier this is really not a tale of the little blue widget, but a story about producers and consumers. In a small way, this story describes what often happens in churches when they try to do advertising. Too often churches see themselves more often as consumers than producers when it comes to making good on the promises they make.

What is the role of the consumer? It is to act on the suggestion being made by the marketer/advertiser. In the case of the little blue widget, the consumer’s role is to go to Super-Duper Mart and take a look. None of the burden for making sure the little blue widget is as advertised falls to the consumer.

Many churches believe that “all we have to do is just get our name out there and people will come,” or “Let’s advertise who we are and watch what happens!” Unfortunately, this is a consumer mentality at work, not the mind and heart of a producer.

The media can assist in making people aware, but ultimately producers have to produce! Media is never meant to be a standalone means of delivering the goods. Churches that rely solely on the media to do it all for them are consumers only. They fail to see all the behind-the-scenes work of bringing people, ideas, attitudes and prayerful consideration to bear to make a positive impression in other people’s lives.

Where this tale breaks down of course, is that the church is not “selling Jesus” as if he was a commodity like little blue widgets! What the church at its best is trying to do is enter into relationships with people in order that those others might find in Jesus a relationship of lifelong meaning and eternal hope. That relationship building begins in trying to make a match between what you promise others and what they experience in reality.

Too often churches promise “ a warm and friendly congregation” only to leave the stranger out in the cold while members meet and greet one another (who they know) as long lost friends. It is never enough for media to make the promise and make good on the experience. The only ones who can fulfill expectations are the producers, the workers who glimpse a vision of what the transforming power of a relationship with Jesus can do in other people’s lives. These servants apply themselves and assist in motivating others in the congregation to do their level best to produce good fruit!

Producers produce. Consumers consume. How are you doing when it comes to making the life and witness of your church to the loving power of Jesus Christ real, consistent and true for others?

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