

Just doing your job or doing it well?

Every day, millions of people go to work, do their jobs and go home. Very few actually have any talent for the jobs they do, doing it by rote. If you haven't stopped to ever ask yourself whether or not you are suited to the job, it isn't too late. But what is talent?

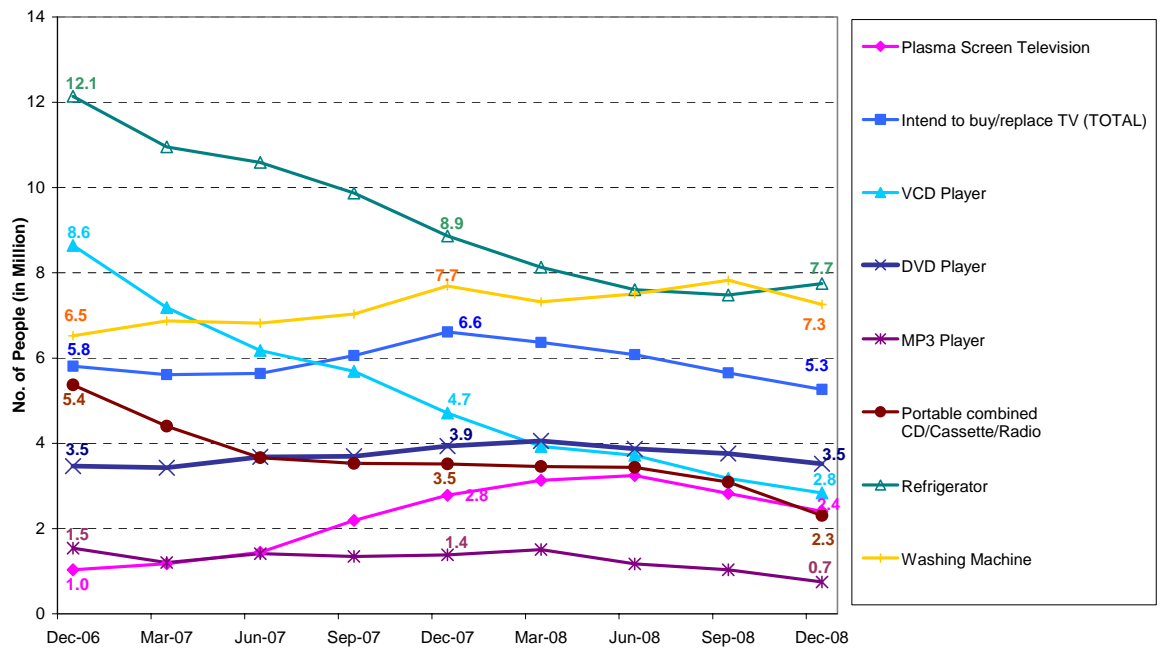
"Talent is the desire to practice". Pithy. I couldn't have said it so simply. Inspired by his earthy wisdom my copy of Malcolm Gladwell's new book "Outliers" is on its way. It reminds me of the obvious reality at the workplace. Not often in the world of business does one meet people who make a distinct impression, one who really knows what he or she is talking about. When you do, a common trait that emerges is their keen interest in what they do. A desire, if not a passion. Without that desire, real talent would be unattainable. Then, without hard work and application, success would remain a distant dream.

Look around you when you go to work today. How many of your colleagues, peers and bosses alike, really have the talent for the jobs they do? How hard do they really try? Many of them may have learned to talk the talk, but not many have the ability to walk that talk. That's when they stumble, their shallow knowledge all too apparent. For leaders, heading a business or a department, talent is a prerequisite. Anybody with talent will tell you that you have to keep honing your abilities, sharpening your skills all the time, or else the rust will set in. If you had the desire sometime ago, but don't have it any more, it's time to move on to something else.

Let's put this in context. In the face of a global financial crisis, managers in Indonesia have a choice before them. Some will use it as a convenient excuse to explain any declines in business, others will sit back and do little to fight the circumstances, but a handful of the really talented will stand up to the challenge and navigate the best way forward. As an adman-turned-researcher, it pains me to see how shallow most professionals in responsible positions really are. For example, any marketer with any talent will tell you that there was a time when the smartest person in the company was the marketing head, at the advertising agency it was the strategic planner. Not anymore. Today, the exceptions prove the rule. More often than not, it is the CFO who is now the CEO's most trusted general.

Here's why. Perhaps the most valuable asset that any planner possesses is the ability to separate the grain from the chaff. A cursory look at Bank Indonesia's index will tell you that the Indonesian consumer continues to gain in confidence, a sharp contrast to most consumers in most other countries both in the region and around the world. If you look at the fine print you realise that the survey is conducted only in 18 cities, therefore representing the views of less than 20 per cent of the population. Anybody with any marketing talent will agree that life in a big city is different from life in a small town, which is again different from life in the *kampung*. Regardless, that information serves no other purpose other than that of a macro-indicator of the urban mood. Nobody in their right minds would pre-suppose that all consumers of all brands in all categories of products and services in all of those 18 cities all have similar levels of confidence. Is it conceivable that the BCA customer is more confident than the BRI customer? Or that the BRI rural customer today is more upbeat than his urban counterpart, less concerned with global crises? Is it not important to make these distinctions?

CONSUMER DEMAND FOR APPLIANCES



In contrast to the Bank Indonesia index the Roy Morgan Consumer Confidence is designed for marketers, linked directly to each brand, to each geography, to each group of ‘buyers’, ‘users’ and ‘intenders’. It’s a starting point for the planning process. Yet, even today, many marketers and agency planners alike are still using ancient demographic definitions like “SES B, urban, male, 25-35 years, SMA+” to define target groups. That would assume that all of those people behave similarly, have similar intentions and brand preferences. Nothing could be more ridiculous in this day and age, when better consumer insights exist. How about “people intending to buy a motorcycle” or “intending to switch Main SIM card”, or “Main Grocery Buyer” quantified by geography and profiled 360-degrees? If such capabilities were not available in Indonesia, planners could be forgiven for carrying the old shotgun instead of the sniper’s telescopic rifle, euphemistically speaking. Remaining in the Dark Ages by choice, denying the available truth can only prove that ignorance is bliss, for far too many people just doing their jobs. Badly.

Even a cursory look at the current demand for white and brown goods would tell an amateur that people behave differently not only in different times but also within different product categories. While the situation isn’t exactly rosy, notice how the demand line for refrigerators is tilting upwards while most other products are still heading south. Who are these people, are they all the same? Is it important to know the differences? Go figure, as they say.

These conclusions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, a syndicated survey with over 25,000 Indonesians 14 years and older interviewed each year. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, in the top 20 cities, other urban centres and rural as well. That national database is updated every 90 days, tracking changes as they happen in these turbulent times.

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