



What Life Science Marketers Can Do to Improve Their Skills

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Today's guest has had multiple marketing and sales roles with companies like Qiagen, Illumina and Life Technologies, now Thermo Fisher. He is currently a director of market development at SeraCare. I was interested in talking to Dale having seen some of his content from Thermo Fisher and because of his broad background. The focus of our conversation was about the things marketers can do to help their own careers as well as make a difference for their companies. Dale Yuzuki, welcome to Life Science Marketing Radio.

Dale: Thank you for having me.

Chris: All right, I'm really excited about this. Today, we're going to talk a little bit about leadership and career development for marketers in the life sciences. So first of all, just so everybody knows who I'm talking to, tell me a little bit about your background. You started out as microbiologist and then got a master's in education. I will let you take it from there.

Dale: Sure, when I was an undergraduate at UCLA, I thought, well, I'll just go ahead and become a high school teacher instead of going to medical school. And becoming a science teacher, I worked in Orange County, California, for a couple years. This was way back when the genetic engineering revolution was just beginning. This is in the late '80s, early '90s. I knew there was a lot going on in terms of biotechnology as an industry. And after the second year of teaching honors chemistry, physics, biology, there is a lot more in the real world, not to say that high school education isn't affecting the real world. It certainly does. But it's affecting it in a different way in terms of people rather than the industry.

So I went back to graduate school at San Francisco State, decided not to go pursue a PhD, even though I got into a couple programs because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with a

PhD. Even back then, it was, do I want to devote my life to a career in research? And it wasn't clear to me whether or not I would really love the research side of things, especially after three years away from an undergraduate education laboratory experience.

So after two years, finished a master's degree at San Francisco State and then started working on the academic side of things, frankly, as a research technician and then having more and more responsibility in San Francisco Bay area for a while in immunology and then down in Santa Monica at the Cancer Institute

And then in 2003, there was a number of changes. Certainly, it was the Human Genome Project had been finished. There was a whole rearrangement as vendors had to rearrange or adjust their expectations in terms of sales. The human proteomics efforts were a bit slow to get off the ground.

Several of my supervisors and colleagues went to move to San Diego area in 2002, 2003 to work for a small company startup at that time known as Illumina. And at that time, 2003, there was maybe a hundred employees selling all [inaudible 00:04:08] and plates and competing against Operon but, at the same time, working on their first product and their first customer, an 1152-plex. It was a high throughput genotyping using a technology called Golden Gate on a fiber optic arrays and these centric arrays. They had one customer lined up, which happened to be the Sanger Institute.

So here it is. I moved to San Diego with a one-year-old child and ended up at Illumina for six or seven years, first in product management roles in San Diego, 2005, moved out here in the Maryland area, where I sold to NIH both for that first human one genotyping BeadChip.

But here it is, I'm getting into the fun part of working in life sciences. Frankly, from a career point of view, I remember as an undergraduate at UCLA thinking, "Well, I do really well in physics and in mathematics, so I could go into engineering like my older brother did." But this life science thing, it just seems so open-ended. It just seems so creative. It just seems so yet unexplored territory. And in the ensuing decades, I can say that, yes, it is unexplored territory. Yes, we are in the beginning of a genomics revolution. And these are very, very, very early days as far as seeing the full fruits of the Human Genome Project. And maybe I sound a lot like Francis Collins when gets up and shares about the NIH direction with regard to personalized medicine, with regard to all of these frontiers of science that the NIH and then private industry are pushing forward. But these are amazing days for anybody to be involved, either on the research side or in the applied side in terms of corporate research or on the vendor side in terms of life science.

Just a thumbnail, in sales, key account sales for Illumina through the end of 2008. Pursued an opportunity with RainDance Technologies in the early days in the year 2009. In 2010, was a SOLiD sales specialist for the Southeast with Life Technologies and then with Ion

Torrent. And then about last year and a half, been doing content marketing for Life Technologies, launched the Behind the Bench blog and underneath Accelerating Science for Thermo Fisher. And then just six months ago, joined a new position as director of marketing, market development, oncology, for SeraCare to help them commercialize precision medicine products, particular with regard to oncology and reference materials. That's where I am today in a nutshell.

Chris: Yeah, so a lot of different roles you've had in your career. What I want to ask you next is, so standing in your marketing shoes and looking back at all those things that you just described to us from doing customer tech support, being a product manager at QIAGEN then at Illumina and doing sales, what has been the most helpful to you?

Dale: I'd say that one of the most valuable skills is knowing how to sell things. By that, I mean knowing how to persuade people recognize value of what you have and being able to persuade others on the value of what you have. And from a marketing point of view, it's when you're in front of a customer and the customer saying, "Well, you're offering me this and this and this. And it does this and this and this. And it costs this. Why should I get you versus somebody else, because they're offering this and they're offering the other?"

And I think for a marketer, that was I'd say the most valuable experience I've had. And that was a good six years in different sales roles from either a local rep to an overlay position where you're a technical specialist. It is extremely valuable to understand, what is the value of what I have? And that kind of experience and that kind of knowledge...There are people who dip their toes into sales. They'll do it for a year. They'll do it for two years. I'd say that's not enough. They might say, "Well, isn't two years enough?" But I think of the best marketers that I know may have just an innate instinct that may be just natural, right? And maybe that is.

But so much of sales is combination of natural ability and talent combined with, again, a real-world understanding of what makes customers tick, what makes customers buy, and then being able to help and form that effort to where a marketing person standing in front a group of salespeople, they can quickly discern who has street smart understanding of what is going on versus those who don't. And you just can't get that from reading a book. You just can't get that from taking classes. You get that from carrying the bag and talking to customers.

Now, I understand in a marketing role, they may want to do ride-alongs and see certain customers. But it is a different kind of role, right? They're diving in to explore a particular customer's problems or throw out a few new product ideas, but it is a bit different task. And of course, they get market intelligence. They see it from a particular method. But I'd say as far as that aspect of the most valuable thing, I'd say it's those years of experience that stand in good stead for anybody.

Chris: Yes, so it sounds like it might not always be the same thing, but it's being challenged eye ball to eye ball with a customer to say, "What makes your thing different?" And the answer might not be the same. So you have to understand, based on their challenge, the thing about your product that makes it different.

Dale: Yeah. And there are certain instances where in a business like ours, when all you have is a hammer, you're looking for other nails, right? Everything looks like a nail to you.

But it's really the deep understanding of what the customer's problems are. And there are still many, many unsolved problems.

Chris: Nice, yeah. So I'm interested to learn about one of your biggest challenges and what you learned from it. And I don't mean the most difficult sales or marketing challenge, but a career challenge. So was there ever a moment you thought you weren't heading in the right direction, felt stuck in your path? How did you deal with something like that?

Dale: That's a really good question, because it's like a typical career interview type of question. But here it is. You're talking about challenges within the career. And I'd say that it was probably that move from Los Angeles area to San Diego in 2003. QIAGEN was going through some major reorganization, and I was asked as a marketing person to gain sales experience. So isn't that ironic that I just told you that the most valuable thing I did in my marketing career was to go into sales, and the director of marketing at that time was making it very clear that she wanted her marketing people to have sales experience. However, I didn't feel it was the right time, company, opportunity, technology for me to go from marketing into sales for QIAGEN, also with the expectation that was only going to be a year or two and then cycle back in.

I felt that, well, yes, sales is going to be in my future. I didn't know exactly how it was going to be in my future. But it was just not the right time. And therefore, when I had an opportunity to go into a product management role in terms of it was more development-oriented rather than tactical...And I make the distinction, because you have product management roles that are more along the lines of market development, customer-facing activities, and collateral and exhibits and those kinds of things, promotions, sales training, versus the product development piece, which is more along the lines of traditional product manager. And now, a lot of companies split the two roles, right? You have product managers who manage the product and development inside, and then you have people who are doing the customer-facing activities outside.

In my current role today, I'm combining both. SeraCare is just having me do both, which is fine. It's a lot of fun. I get to reassemble the pieces in a new way. And yet, that was a bit of a career challenge. And of course, whenever somebody changes geographies, you know what impacts it has. And yet what flexibility it offers career path wise, if you're free to relocate.

And frankly, for people listening, maybe they're in a, so to speak, smaller market where the opportunities for life science companies is not so great. Yes, it comes with territory in terms of how the geographies go, and those are hard choices, and I appreciate the challenge.

And for Illumina, it was a situation where I was able to move from a marketing role into a field sales role. But then the opportunity was a big one. And then I told my wife, moving to San Diego, "Oh, hey, if Illumina doesn't work out, there are other companies I can work for, what have you." And two and half years later, it's "There's this neat opportunity. There's this thing called whole-genome genotyping and genome-wide association, which is ready to take off, and they have an opening for the Mid-Atlantic area. And it would be covering National Institutes of Health."

Chris: Yeah. You may have talked about this in the sales part, but if it's not that, we should go into it a little bit more. So where do you think marketers have the biggest opportunity to improve their skills and help their companies and their own careers?

Dale: I think as far as the marketing that I see, and I just came back from a molecular pathology meeting in Austin, Texas, and I think about marketers and what poor marketing looks like. I went to a couple of vendors workshops and their choice of speakers was just outright poor, in that, the speakers were talking about topics that did not relate to the customers' problems. And in terms of the improvement of skills and marketing skills, I challenge people who are listening to this, do you know what your customers are doing? Do you keep up on the reading of your customers, meaning their publications? Do you read science and nature? Are you a hardcore science nerd geek? Whatever, right?

Chris: Yeah.

Dale: Because it's on that aspect that I find a great amount of ignorance among marketing people and a great amount of carelessness in their marketing because they don't understand the application area that they should be experts in. They don't understand the challenges that customers face and then to be able to choose a speaker who can have something that they're working on that's in alignment with that. Of course, they're not going to be an advertisement for you. They're going to talk about their work. But it's got to illustrate some of the value of the things that you're selling in the marketplace. And that kind of disconnect, of not knowing what your customers are doing, indicates "Wow, they're just out of touch. They're not talking to customers. They're not engaging customers with their problems. And therefore, they're not meeting customer's needs with products," right?

Chris: Right.

Dale: And they're not positioning it right. They're not messaging it right. They're not connected to that. And you might say, "Well, how does somebody get started? How do they become better engaged?" And it's, well, so much information is available for free now. So much is available via the power of just being online, not to mention the fact that Nature and Science are published every week, right?

Chris: Right.

Dale: There it is. Let's say, well, it's too much. It's all too much. Well, yes, welcome to the real world. It is all too much. But if you want to market effectively to your customer base, you'll be reading your customers' papers. You'll be familiar with their problems. You'll see how your products are being used, right?

Do I expect a person to become completely up to speed in a matter of a week? No, it takes a lot of hard work. And I tell my daughter, yeah, hard work hasn't killed anybody, but it scares a lot of people. It just frightens people to death, right? They'll do anything than to sit down and read. They'll do anything but go to the poster sessions and take a look around in terms of what's going on.

I admit I don't spend as much time among the posters as I need to. But nonetheless, the hour that I spent looking through the posters at molecular pathology were invaluable. They were so valuable because I'm seeing what my competition is doing. I'm seeing what other customers are doing with this kind of analysis, right?

Chris: Okay, so I'm going to go back to something you said right at the beginning of that, and that was having an experience at a conference where a company has brought in someone to speak. And they were out of touch with what their customers need. I'm curious how that happens. Do they pick a high-profile customer who's doing something that isn't really the thing that will most benefit their business or...?

Dale: It was confusing to me for this one workshop I had in mind with regard to, yeah, it may have been interesting from a scientific point of view but maybe not so applicable for how their customers are using their product every day. Maybe I'll put it this way. It was an unusual use case of that company's product. And you don't want unusual use cases. You don't want this esoteric, out on a limb, this big name brand customer was using are product in this unusual kind of way because it's not that applicable to the normal attendee at the conference who is looking for information that's going to help them with their day job. Particularly in a very clinically focused meeting like Molecular Pathology... Maybe if it were Experimental Biology with new techniques, you get customers that are going to be all over the place, right?

Chris: You're trying to expand your market but sounds like you...

Dale: Man, really, it was this aspect of, well, we want to share information and to share customer applications that are relevant. And then it gets back to, well, what is the end state? It's not complicated, right? What is it I want the customer to come out with? If I want a customer to describe a workshop, how would they describe it in one sentence? As far as you know, what is the call to action? What is that memorable one liner they want to come out for? And this is not rocket science, right? You might say, "Dale, so much of what you're saying sounds like common sense." It's like, "Well, yes, but the common sense may not be all that common because in whatever thinking that has gone through, yeah, you have to think through it."

Chris: Yep.

Dale: And on that note, it is content that drives interest. And I had a large conversation with a good friend at Thermo, and we think very much alike, which is everybody's talking about content marketing, right? But all they're doing is thinking of the marketing piece of content marketing. They're not thinking about the content piece of content marketing. Why? The content piece of content marketing is hard work. It is hard work to stay at a conference on a Saturday, picking up everything I can with regard to where the field is going. It is hard work to get up at 6:30 or get out of your hotel room at 6:30 to show up for an early bird session at 7 in the morning, but how valuable it is.

And yet, so many marketers are not thinking about the content. They're just thinking of the transportation of the goods. They're not thinking of the goods, right? They're focused on trucks, on planes, on rail, on buses. But they're not thinking about what all that cargo is. And that's the really valuable stuff to the end user. It is the content, right?

And I think that there is a real danger for marketers to just be worried about the publishing platforms and just the mechanisms of tactics. And what life science marketing needs is not more tactic-generating machines. No, we don't need that. What we need is people with content, regardless of what science is doing today and where science is going and even on the amplification or the curation of content or the editorial. People talk about thought leadership. Yeah, you need to have original thinking for thought leadership, and where do you get original thinking? So much of it is from customers. But yes, companies have a role to play there as far as message amplification and curation. And people going in this market today, it's a big world of different competing avenues for attention. But if you got a trusted brand of content, people will go to you.

Dale: And as far as the future of marketers go, in terms of professional development goes, there is a direct relationship between the quality of your writing and the quality of your reading, right? And you say, "Well, okay I'm a good writer or whatever. But no, I'm quality reader. I got to make sure that the stuff I'm reading is good," right? And then you say, "Well, what's the good stuff?" And then you say, "Well, what kind of diet do you want?"

And I don't know, I don't mean to get on a soapbox, but there are people who live on hors d'oeuvres. And I would just go crazy if all I did was snack my way through life. That is just no way to live. It is just on snacks, right? Can you imagine your whole life just eating snacks? And yet, from a marketing point of view, from a content point of view, there are people who are just snacking their way through their career. And let me challenge those of you who are listening here. You got marketers, your professionals, step up and get real meals, genuine meals, full-course meals. Don't be afraid to do the hard work.

And it's an interactive kind of thing. And I think the other thing on the writing is it takes an enormous amount of practice, an enormous amount of practice.

Chris: Oh yeah, absolutely. We can do a whole podcast on writing and blogging and the tools that you could use to gather ideas and create good content. And I'll share it right now. I'm taking three copywriting courses right now just to improve my own skills in that area. And it's not even something I sell. It's just something I want to get good at.

Dale: Yeah, and on that note, maybe we'll finish with that, is this culture of learning, this idea of always improving and enlarging the boundaries. And from wherever you can, it's so important to go ahead and just do it, right? Just learn. There's so many resources available for that kind of career development and improvement, even the things that you do for fun. It might be programming class. Where that could lead, I don't know. But I took a programming class myself. And it was really, really informative, because I understood these kinds of things can really help in unexpected ways. So that idea of, from a company point of view, how could they improve their marketer skills, yeah, how do they get that culture of learning? How do they encourage our employees to take advantage of every opportunity to have classes either formally or informally? How can people have lunch-and-learns and different other ways for people to help that cross-functional learning? Even people that makes sideways moves in their careers just to learn new things and new roles. All these things are valid ways to learn.

Chris: Yeah, so that's all been hugely helpful. I'm going to connect a link to your blog at SeraCare and your personal blog at Next Generation Technologist. I'll put the link in for that. Before we go do you have any one piece of advice for listeners who want to be leaders in their organization?

Dale: Maybe it's just this quote from Brian Tracy, "The more you learn, the more you earn."

Chris: You can't go wrong with that.

Dale: Can't go wrong with that.

Chris: All right. Well, Dale Yuzuki, it's been pleasure talking to you today. I thank you very much for all that insight on professional development, the importance of good content, and how to get it.

Dale: Thanks a lot, Chris. It's a pleasure.

Chris: All right, thank you. Bye-bye.

Dale: Bye-bye.

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