

What we learned from Hillbrow

 By [Helen McIntee](#)

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As marketers, we should be looking at how we can improve delivery time and thus improve consumers' lives. In so doing, we create a competitive advantage. Internet banking and online shopping has gone a long way to easing our hectic, fast-paced lives, but more can be done.

The UK is certainly on track: Tesco grocery and general retail chain in the UK is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week; car wash companies come to your office or home; motor companies are beginning to open their doors through the night and weekends for car servicing.

In Dubai, shopping centres and banks open later and close later, up to 10pm, and you can even catch a movie at midnight.

In SA without thinking about it, we have cell phone call centres operating through the night, PnP undertaking home grocery delivery service, and PG Glass coming to your home or office for car window replacement. Quite honestly, PG Glass stands out because it is a rare animal in our country. In the good ol' days we could gobble a Hillbrow Bimbo's burger right up to 5am. In fact, 70s/80s Hillbrow was legendary for running on the adrenalin of night owls before the rising sun sent them rushing for a cold shower ahead of a productive work day.

We need to stimulate and market delivery service to account for the busy people, like myself, who would far prefer to do grocery shopping at 9 or 10pm on my way home from work, and have the advantage of fewer crowds, less queues, and ease of parking in a secure environment. It might be that I can shop online but there is something sensuous about touching, smelling and feeling things, and nothing beats the thrill of an impulse purchase and the immediacy of having what you want right now.



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Knowing this, companies are beginning to turn towards the task of marketing management. We in the industry often describe it as the matching of scarce resources (raw materials, money and people) to the best possible market opportunities that allow for the greatest profit. It is a task that also involves creating a 'sustainable competitive advantage' (SCA) to ensure on-going economic relevance for a company and to create a reason for the consumer to select a product over a competitor's.

Michael Porter's 'Five Forces' model describes three ways of creating a competitive advantage: Cost Leadership; Differentiation; and Focus. More recently, Downes and Mui claim that in this changed and changing world, we need to consider three new forces: Digitisation; Globalisation; and Deregulation. It is further asserted that whilst creating SCA was always extremely difficult, it is compounded by the three new forces that now surround the 'Five Forces' and exert more pressure on the competitive environment.

This supports the reality that, in recent years, creating SCA with the actual, tangible, product has become increasingly difficult because new technologies and innovations enable companies to match - and indeed leapfrog - competitive offerings. Businesses have therefore moved their focus from the production and manufacturing arena into that of the augmented product - creating SCA by adding intangible services and support such as maintenance plans and unmatched guarantees. Some organisations have successfully used 'digitisation' (as in the internet and other technologies) to create an SCA.

As the marketing discipline becomes more sophisticated and concentrates more on consumer's needs and desires, the focus is shifting from 'making more product' to 'making more consumer-appropriate product' and, as we make the move towards this concept of customer centricity, we urgently need to think more about our consumers' time limitations, as well as the organisation's, and is something being included in the curricula at marketing academies such as the Institute of Marketing Management and its UK affiliate the Oxford Marketing College.

Just as we segment our markets according to demographics, psychographics and behaviour, by including 'time availability' as a variable, companies that do pay attention could certainly achieve a 'heads up' over the competition, particularly in the service industry.

ABOUT HELEN MCINTEE

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