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CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARKETING TO WOOD SCIENCE

The practical application of marketing strategies and tools is widely accepted in industry and society as a means of efficiently connecting demand and supply. This notion is reinforced by global events in the past half-century that demonstrate the superiority of market-based economic systems over those that are centrally planned. Despite the acceptance of practical application, the question is often debated whether marketing is a science.

For those focusing their careers on marketing, the endeavor to understand the fundamentals of market-based human behavior is a science, as are such fields as wood engineering, wood physics, or wood chemistry. The purpose of wood science is to develop knowledge that allows the effective and efficient use of wood to meet societal needs. This can be best met through an understanding of wood as a material AND the use of that material as influenced by humans.

Marketing as a science evolved from a number of mother sciences such as economics, psychology, and sociology. Marketing was first taught in North America in the early 1900s in business schools. As in most disciplines, specialization has fragmented marketing into subdisciplines such as research methods, sales, consumer behavior, and strategy. There is a common separation between consumer and industrial marketing.

Forest products marketing in North America began in the early 1970s with the work of Dr. Stuart Rich from the University of Oregon (forest products marketing in Europe began in the 1940s in Finland). Dr. Rich published the first textbook in this discipline. Another significant contributor to the field in North America was Dr. Steve Sinclair. A number of current leaders in the field received their training in his program.

Only in recent decades has the forest industry embraced the marketing concept and begun an evolution from a production orientation towards a marketing orientation. With this shift in industry came a demand for research and skilled employees. Recognizing this demand, academic institutions began adding faculty and programs in the field. Today, most wood science programs have faculty working

in marketing or business and curricula designed to meet the growing need from industry for employees with a basic knowledge of wood combined with marketing and business skills. In some programs, marketing-oriented students are a major component of the student body. These students are actively sought, and demand significantly outpaces supply.

Marketing is prevalent in industry and current wood science programs, but *is forest products marketing a science?* Just as other sciences, forest products marketing utilizes the scientific method: identifies problems, gathers relevant data, develops hypotheses, and empirically tests those hypotheses. As such, it is fair to place forest products marketing along with traditional wood sciences. In many ways, forest products marketing differs from traditional wood sciences, yet they are complementary and together form strong wood science programs.

Academic institutions across the continent of North America continually struggle to attract students into wood science programs. Competition in the industry is changing dramatically, and products are evolving to meet diverse societal needs. Industry requires insightful research and employees with a strong business/wood background. There is a mutual need between the traditional wood sciences and marketing science. We must work together to develop our fundamental understanding of wood as a material AND a fundamental understanding of business systems and wood users. We have a great future together; mutual reliance is an imperative for success.

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