

# Doug Ringer

## Product Quality is Irrelevant Because It's Expected

Product quality can no longer be effectively used as a marketing tool for products. The quality of the products your customers can purchase today is higher than ever and most items work as advertised well past their warranty period. When they don't, companies typically handle the issue with easy return and replacement policies.

The enormous improvement in product quality over the past 25 years have customers expecting the products they purchase to perform as intended for a period of time commensurate with their cost. Marketing programs based around quality of the product is akin to car manufacturers advertising that their automobiles come with steering wheels.

There are four reasons for this. In no special order, they are:

1. The internet is the great equalizer
2. Most manufacturers have read or know of Dr. Deming and "colored belts" are everywhere
3. Government watchdogs are more pervasive than ever
4. Worldwide standards and capabilities are higher and more similar than ever before

### **1. The internet as the great equalizer**

The invention of instant communication via the internet has homogenized the industrial world. This homogenization has permitted corporations to base a large portion of their manufacturing in Asia. This would have been impossible without the instant communications provided by the internet via e-mail, shared cloud services, FTP sites, etc. The other item that the internet has created, and the focus of this paper, is the ability for customers to communicate among themselves quickly and effectively about products with poor quality.

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A business can no longer produce a substandard product and expect to survive for very long. Sufficient quality is expected from consumers therefore using “high quality” as a marketing tool is now meaningless. The ease of communications has raised the bar on quality.

An example is Mercedes-Benz automobiles. Mercedes is world renowned for their quality and luxury, and rightfully so. Until a few years ago, their tagline was “Engineered like no other car in the world.” This implied their level of quality was unmatched. They have recently dropped this tagline because the high-level engineered quality is no longer unique. It is still great but other manufacturers can now achieve these same levels of quality.

## **2. Everyone has read Dr. Deming and “colored belts” are everywhere**

When W. Edwards Deming went to Japan in the early 1960’s, quality industrial production went with him. Dr. Deming (among others) is credited with turning around Japanese industry and bringing it out of the devastation wrought by WWII. There is little argument that they accomplished this and the success is in large part due to their efforts to improve the quality of Japanese products.

Today, most manufacturers are following Dr. Deming’s ideas and concepts, those of his acolytes, or the “Six Sigma” model made popular in the 1980’s by Motorola. The widespread use of these tools implemented by today’s practitioners who signifying their rank with multi-colored belts have created an industrial world that produces quality products with excellent reliability.

## **3. Government watchdogs are more pervasive than ever**

The government of the United States of America, and of many other countries, has wide-reaching and deep power to monitor, regulate, and if necessary, prosecute corporations for harm caused by poor product safety and quality. Corporations do not want to run afoul of these government agencies because of the cost of litigation and the negative reviews from the press corps.

Similar to the consequences described in the first topic, the ability of governments to communicate and then cooperate to punish companies for unsafe products forces companies to ensure they are doing everything possible manufacture good quality and safe products.

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## **4. Worldwide standards and capabilities are higher and more alike than ever before**

The worldwide measures for quality have become standardized, mainly as a consequence of instant communications and multi-national corporations. This standardization has forced companies to adopt the same measurement techniques and test limits to remain competitive. The first companies to adopt these standards had a marketing advantage but now that all have adopted the same policies, the advantage has shifted to the consumer.

There are some countries that use ultra-restrictive standards as a means to stifle competition from imports, but even these countries must produce products that meet global standards for quality and profitability if they are to be sold successfully in the global marketplace.

Product quality is very important to the commercial success of products and services. The Japanese proved it in the 1970's in the electronics and automobile industries and their success was based on the quality improvement work of Dr. Deming and others starting in the 1960's.

However, using marketing and advertising resources to prove how much quality you provide squanders these resources. Customers expect a level of product quality commensurate with the price paid and no amount of marketing will change their expectation. If your product does not meet this minimum threshold, then customers will purchase from your competitors. If your quality is level with or better than your industry, no one will notice.

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*[Doug Ringer](http://www.dougringer.com) currently manages IP cameras for Schneider Electric in their video surveillance business. Doug has held global roles in marketing, manufacturing and R&D at General Electric, Ericsson, Honeywell, Meritor and in a small private firm. He also served on the board of directors and president of the board of a civil rights organization based in Kentucky. Doug lives with his family in Fort Collins, Colorado. Follow him at <http://www.dougringer.com>.*