



Is Poor Customer Service Deteriorating Your Brands Value?

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It can be said that brands hold both mental and emotional real estate in the minds and hearts of customers. Firms that live up to their brand promises can and do charge 20-200% more than their competition. Their customers stay longer and so do their employees.

However, all of us have experienced customer service that didn't live up to our expectations of a brands performance. We may have been on the receiving end of the transaction and it may have seemed like we knew more about the product or service we were buying than the staff member helping us. We may have been behind the service counter ourselves delivering service inconsistent with our own brands promises. Some products are easier to deliver. Think about how much human interaction you have had recently while buying gas or a book on Amazon. Human beings complicate service delivery. Service intensive businesses have more work cut out for them. They continually have a chance to deliver service that either supports or deteriorates the brand. Even if the one employee does a great job fulfilling customer expectations, another may drop the ball afterwards. Good examples are dining or traveling by airline or cruise ship. These businesses and others like them have to ensure that service delivery and service recovery is consistent at every touch point to effectively drive a brands full value.

But, staff can't deliver what they don't know or understand. Most staff members receive "smile training" and no real brand orientation. They are not given adequate knowledge to deliver on a brand's promises.

A personal experience tells the story. Once, while waiting in line at a FedEx/Kinko's, I noticed on a wall behind the counter a framed mission statement. I could read it from where I was standing and was impressed by what it said. When I got to the counter, I asked a staff member if I could have a copy. The employee had no idea what document I was referring to. I told him to turn around and look at the wall where the document was hanging. He commented that he had never even noticed it hanging there before and went over to read it himself! How could this happen?





Studies reveal that 62% of employees who interface with customers lack their own management's support to deliver their brand effectively. Not unlikely, as 45% of those managers don't understand the positioning of the brand themselves.

It is critical that we learn to link staff behavior with our own brands vision, mission, policies and customer service. We must teach everyone on our team from the CEO to the janitor, what our brand means and how that meaning determines the distinct level of service we must deliver to support the brand. It's important that our team deliver that full brand value on a consistent basis day in and day out. A good example? Think about Starbucks and the strength of its brand. It is continually supported through consistent customer service. You most always receive excellent service at both ends of the counter. It's important to note here that Starbucks spends more on employee training than on marketing.

Another story I'll share. Standing at the check out at an Albertsons grocery store, I noticed a new neatly printed sign on the side of the register where I was about to pay. I had not seen it before. The sign read, "You're a valued customer at Albertsons! If I fail to greet you with a smile and say thank you, you will receive 1 dozen eggs for free!" What an interesting new way to promise great customer service! I commented on the new sign to the gal at the register. Her reply? "That's what they say I'm gonna do, but you can just go ahead and get your eggs if you want to." Studies show that 40% of marketing is wasted on unmotivated or uninformed staff members. Again, staff can't deliver what they don't know.

Essentially there are two things going on internally that cause disparity between what a firm's management says its brand will do and what it actually does in terms of customer service delivery. First, statistics show that most often senior management has not truly taken the time needed to develop the firms brand DNA. Brand DNA refers to the core vision, mission, values and personality of the firm. They are those essential elements that must show up in everything the firm does and includes how a customer is treated at every touch point. Without this knowledge, the firms' management team can't deliver a foundational understanding of the brand to staff members.



The other critical pitfall is that the most management teams who have in fact taken the time needed to flush out the brands DNA in full, have not figured out how to effectively communicate those deliverables to the rest of their team. Team members need to be reading from same page of the playbook to deliver consistent brand value.

In next month's issue of Deep Insights, we will further outline brand DNA and introduce a plan to get your own brand DNA into the hands of your team members who can drive service that supports your brands full value.

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