

Differentiate Your Company Through the Delivery of a Consistent Exceptional Experience

BY EILEEN P. MONESSON



It is no secret that consumers are bombarded with marketing messages on a daily basis. Marketers are challenged to make their message stand out from the crowd to get noticed. The key is to define how your company is different from the competition.

Although most businesses believe that they offer something unique, few communicate what makes them truly different to the market

From years of experience working with professional service providers, most companies consider service as a point of differentiation. Several years ago, I conducted a market research study to help a firm position itself in the market. The study included a review of competitive brochures and websites. It resulted in learning that every competitor used service as a positioning strategy.

While customers like a consistent level of exceptional service, few companies take the time to define what that really means. Even worse, most businesses do not communicate to employees what they need to do to deliver consistent exceptional service, which results in a gap. Consumers have an image of your company that is not the same as the vision that you have. A survey of customers from approximately 400 companies reported only eight percent of companies actually delivered a superior experience. Of the companies surveyed, 80 percent believe that the service they provide is indeed superior. The study also showed that a five percent increase in customer retention can increase a company's profitability by 75 percent (Bain & Company).

So why do businesses spend more time and money on advertising that they provide exceptional service than actually delivering that service? The answer is simple. Marketers focus more on the creative brand than the cultural or organizational brand. Both are critical to differentiate your business in today's competitive marketplace. No matter how creative your company's marketing is, it will not be successful unless employees are focused on delivering on the brand promises made in promotional messages.

Another study showed that 79 percent of employees are unwilling to go the extra mile to help their companies succeed (Towers Perrin 2007). Even so, employees at great companies such as the Ritz Carlton and Nordstrom go that extra mile every day. Great companies train employees on what they have to do to live the brand and hold them accountable.

"Brand integrity is the ultimate business and management strategy," states Gregg Lederman, founder of Brand Integrity, Inc. and author of *Achieve Brand Integrity*. "Brand integrity aligns who a company is (core values, mission/vision, and strategic benefits) with where it is going (goals and strategic plans) and how employees will deliver the behaviors and experiences to achieve results. The four realities of branding are:

- The brand is not part of the business, it is the business.
 - A brand is about experiences, not logos or taglines.
 - The little things a company does consistently are much more important than the big things that it says.
 - A well-executed brand strategy is the single most important differentiator between a good company and a great company."
- Companies today have to focus on its message

and delivery mechanism, which includes employee interactions with customers both in-person and online. The emergence of Social Media channels, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in business has changed the game. Companies now need to integrate the experience they want customers to have across all media channels. This involves carefully crafting the message, as well as monitoring its delivery. Since the Internet is interactive, anyone, even a trusted employee, can post both good and bad comments on their experience with you.

Forward thinking businesses use the Internet to their advantage. Besides having a Web site, they invest in online advertising, blogs, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, as well as E-books to demonstrate the value they can bring to a relationship. Some even incorporate online chat rooms to communicate directly with customers. "E-marketing has exploded in the past couple of years," adds James A. Mahlmann, Creative Director and Founder of Netcetra, LLC, an Internet marketing and Web design company. "Companies use to be primarily concerned with Search Engine Optimism and click through rates which continue to be important. Now, they want to ensure that there is a consistent message and look across all media channels to represent their brand."

Although Internet marketing and Social Media is essential in building brand recognition, companies need to carry through what they do online to all media channels. The creative message needs to be consistent across the board in print, radio, and television, as well as tied to the point of differentiation and its delivery. If you truly want to stand out from your competition, customers need to experience your value proposition every time they interact with your company. ■

Eileen P. Monesson is a founding Principal of PRCounts, llc. The firm was established in 2010 and specializes in the accounting, law, IT and health care industries. Eileen can be contacted at 609-570-2150 or emonesson@prcounts.com.