

# **DISPATCHES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

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Sunday, November 15, 2009

## **ARE YOU TURNING-OFF CUSTOMERS? – IT’S THE EXPERIENCE STUPID**

We’ve written a few DISPATCHES articles dealing with the importance of the customer’s experience with your products and services. We dramatized these articles by exhorting “it’s the experience stupid.” No, let us reassure you in this article that we are not calling you stupid. Instead, this is drawing, for dramatic effect, from the Bill Clinton versus senior George Bush 1992 presidential campaign where the economy was the critical and deciding issue. Today, people still will confirm the rather obvious learning, “It’s the economy stupid.”

In this *age of sameness* developing a healthy brand depends upon going beyond the physical product you market to include the experience you deliver. We need to get beyond our products since they are basically the same as our competitors. We need to look at the whole product, which is comprised not just of the physical product but intangibles that deliver the totality of the experience for customers.

The experience we deliver can make a difference in creating brand loyalty, even inspiring brand evangelists (as in the case of Apple Computer Company with Mac and iPod) or turning off customers and delivering them into the waiting arms of our competition. This article is about the latter experience. It recounts a “hellish” experience as told with intense passion (undoubtedly in a fit of painful frustration) by BDNI instructor and consultant, Dave Roche, in dealing with Dell Computer Corporation regarding his purchase of a new laptop and docking system.

### **Seventy-two Hours Of Hell With Dell**

**By Dave Roche**

“What a weekend. I arrived home Friday night after a great week of work and knowing that my new computer from Dell had arrived while I was away. I couldn’t wait to spend the weekend enjoying my new purchases.

While I was unpacking upstairs, Taryn (*Dave’s step-daughter*) surprised me by setting up my new computer, my new monitor and my new docking station in my office. It was going to be a great weekend. We had one problem. The new monitor did not work when it was connected to the new docking station, the docking station that was recommended by the sales representative for my new computer. It was time to call Dell Technical Support.

The first technician I talked to had me disconnecting wires and plugging and unplugging the docking station for almost an hour. She finally admitted that she didn’t know anything about this

docking station and I would have to call the original manufacturer, Kensington. I spent another hour or so re-reading the instructions, going to the Kensington website and looking-up FAQ's and technical information.

I called Kensington on Monday to be told that the docking station was not compatible with Windows 7. The docking station automatically downloaded drivers that would not work with my computer. I asked the technician why the customer was not informed about this issue and she didn't have an answer. A simple note with the product instructing the customer to download the proper drivers from the website would have saved me a few hours.

We downloaded the new drivers together and then plugged the computer into the docking station. The docking station, which was designed to download its drivers automatically, started downloading the drivers that didn't work with Windows 7. The new download wiped-out the download from the website and we were back to square one. We downloaded the correct drivers again and, after plugging the computer into the docking station one more time, I quickly interrupted the automatic download and the monitor was working.

I was worried about what would happen each time I came home from a trip and plugged the computer into the docking station but I was assured that the new drivers were in place and I would not have a problem (did I mention that I had to restart my computer seven times during this process?). I tested the docking station a few times after the call and yes, each time I plugged the computer into the docking station, it automatically tried to download the bad drivers. Time to talk to Dell about replacing the Kensington Docking Station.

I received the Belkin "Easy Transfer Cable for Windows 7" (note the reference to "easy") so I was ready to transfer my files from my old computer to my new computer. I setup the transfer and when I pushed the magic button, my new computer told me that I didn't have enough memory in the new computer to receive the 61GB of files. I purchased a new computer with 320GB of memory! How could this happen? My new computer told me I had only 58.5GB available. Is it possible that the wrong size hard drive was installed in my brand new computer? I decided it was time to call Dell Technical Support.

The first technician I talked to helped me see that my hard drive had been split into two parts by a partition and that I had over 200GB in the second part of the hard drive. He couldn't figure out how to change the configuration so I could transfer my files. He even took over my computer online and still couldn't figure out how to transfer my files to the over 200GB that were available. This technician told me it was a software problem and I needed to talk to a software specialist. I was transferred to this software specialist who promptly told me he could fix the problem but he was going to charge me. **NOW THAT WAS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN!!!** Actually, I think I said that he was insane and that I wanted to speak to a supervisor. The only person who made any sense during the 72 hours of speaking to Dell people then picked up the phone. This supervisor knew right away that Windows 7 was installed incorrectly and that he would fix it. He also told me that Dell does not recommend partitions in hard drives and he couldn't understand how anyone could make such a stupid mistake. We had to reinstall Windows 7 twice but I was finally able to transfer my files. I still had issues with my docking station and I had no place to insert my Cardbus Interface Card so, Monday morning, it was time to call Dell Technical Support.

I called Dell for the umpteenth time Monday to order another docking station and get help concerning these interface cards. My good friend the supervisor told me I should get a Dell brand docking station so I asked the technical support person what docking station would be the right one for my new computer. This seemed to be a pretty tough question because it took over 30 minutes for him to come-up with a recommendation. He suggested a Targus docking station with all kinds of bells and whistles. As I started asking questions and looking at the specs on-line while on the phone, I realized that this recommended docking station needed the same port that my interface cards needed and my new computer did not have that port. The technician finally admitted that he didn't know these products and, after over an hour, he suggested I talk to the sales department to get a recommendation.

Another phone transfer and I'm asking sales the same questions. The sales rep recommended another Targus product because it was a simple "Plug-and-Play" docking station, just plug in the wires and away you go. It sounded too good to be true. So I asked what I would be giving up if I switched from the Kensington model. The sales rep looked into the Kensington specs and announced that it was a Plug-and-Play model too. So does this mean that other plug-and-play models download drivers to the computer? She didn't know. She then virtually ended my relationship with Dell by telling me she really didn't understand these products and I needed to talk to technical support (no, you read it correctly, she was telling me to go back to technical support even though technical support told me to talk to her). I looked at my phone and I had spent over 90 minutes in this last phone call and I simply told the sales rep that I had had enough of this incompetence and I wanted her to transfer me to the department that would help me return ALL that I had purchased. I was fed up with Dell.

I was told that Customer Care would arrange for the return labels that I needed. After I was transferred to Customer Care, we dealt with only one return item. I was then told the Returns Specialist (don't you love these titles) would have to handle the balance of my purchases and I was transferred once again. The returns specialist stated that she was very disappointed with my decision because Dell stood for the highest standards (that was the first time she insulted my intelligence). I explained that I was sick of the lack of service and the overall incompetence of the Dell people and I was returning everything. She hoped that I might change my mind and offered me an incentive. She asked if a \$25 gift certificate would change my mind (that was the second time she insulted my intelligence). I told her that \$2500 wasn't enough to pay for the time and hassle dealing with Dell. We then proceeded to process the returns.

She asked me if the computer was working and I said yes. She asked me if the monitor was working and I said yes. I told her it wasn't the products but the incompetence of the service that was causing me to return what I had bought. She then told me there would be a 15% restocking fee because I was returning products that were functioning properly (I think then I blurted out something about my dead body and hell freezing over). I wish I had explained to her at the time that the physical product was only part of the overall product and that the overall product was defective because the service was defective. We solved the restocking fee issue and then I was told that the Returns Specialist could not help me with all the returns and that I would have to talk to Customer Care for my final return (I know this is unbelievable but it's true).

I had my last conversation with Dell when I had my last conversation with the Customer Care representative. Like the Returns Specialist, she sent me an email with the returns label. I didn't

receive the email right away and she told me I would have to call back in 24 hours if I had not received the email. I asked her if her management ever suggested that she call the customer after 24 hours to check to see if everything was ok. She didn't answer. A fitting ending to my 72 hours of hell with Dell.

I'm off to buy a Mac!!”

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

1. ***Get beyond the product and think about the experience you are providing to the brand's customers.*** Think about the experiences prior to purchase, during purchase, in-use and, even, following use. If your product or service is one part of a bigger whole (such as peripherals and technical support are to computing) then think through the linkages and ways you can enhance the whole for your customers. How can you differentiate the brand from competition through the many experiences you deliver?
2. ***Know your product.*** Seems obvious but in Dave's case the sales folks sold Dave a system that was not compatible. The technical support manager did not know how the non-Dell products worked with the Dell computer model with Windows 7 (now that's another story!) that Dave purchased. We need to not only know our product but how it interfaces with others, especially if we bundle them and they are supposed to work together.
3. ***Be genuine in your concern for the customer.*** Imagine you were the customer and view the experience with that point of view. Keep in mind that the objective is not to demonstrate you are right to the customer, or to wrest the sale, but to serve, make that “better serve” your customer than they expect.
4. ***Experience the experience.*** Go beyond imaging to experiencing. Put yourself in the shoes of your customers. Call the toll free number or visit the Website provided for getting additional information and live and feel the experience. What does it feel like to be on the receiving end? What can you learn that will lead to strengthening the brand and its bond with customers?
5. ***Experience your competitors' brands.*** How do they compare? What can you learn from your competitors to improve upon the experience your brand delivers?
6. ***Benchmark brands that deliver world-class experience in other categories.*** Ritz Carlton has been a model for customer service. The Ritz Carlton vision, “We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen” sums-up how the customer can expect to be treated by Ritz Carlton “ladies and gentlemen.”
7. ***Help create a culture within your organization that is customer focused.*** Serve the customer well and brand loyalty is more likely to follow. But you can't just dictate special handling of the customer. If it's not part of the culture, including how workers in the company are treated, it won't play out with customers. Build it into the organization's culture to serve.

8. **Remember “customer rule number 1” - the customer is always correct.** If this fails then adopt “customer rule number 2” – follow rule number one!
9. **Do something heroic for a customer to earn his/her trust.** A \$25 gift certificate is not what we would classify as “heroic.” In fact, it seems more like a slap in the face.

Dave, Mac is a wise, very wise choice. But then we may be somewhat biased. This article of DISPATCHES was written on a Mac.

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