

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, April 11, 2010

WHY NOBODY LOVES YOU

“You’re nobody ‘till somebody loves you.

You’re nobody ‘till somebody cares.”

Larry Stock, Russ Morgan and James Cavanaugh

Perhaps you’re finding that your customers don’t quite love your brand the way they used to love it before we experienced the biggest recession since the great depression. You know what we mean. Sales growth has stalled, or the rate of growth has diminished, or the brand is not achieving its topline forecast. Or you are receiving more customer complaints about your product and/or servicing. Perhaps, the brand is experiencing promotional sales increases as a percentage of total sales. Or the brand is getting less “bang” from marketing support dollars. The product offering may even be experiencing a decline in market share. Maybe the brand’s customers are shopping around for alternatives or even demanding lower prices.

Boo-Hoo. Where is their loyalty? How can these customers be so callous? After all, you love your customers, don’t you?

Well have you told them? Better yet have you showed them? Talk is cheap. It’s what you do that has real meaning. So stop crying and get to work on the relationship. Loyalty is a two-way street. Give love to get love. Maybe it doesn’t always work that way all the time but it does in more cases than in treating people with indifference or putting your needs above their needs. If you are not feeling the love from your customers it could be because you have ceased wooing them. (“Woo” is to court someone’s love.)

Let’s take the airline industry as an example of one that, on the whole, has stopped wooing their customers. Yeah, they know why we fly. It’s because we have to! What seasoned traveler hasn’t had unfavorable experiences with one airline company or other. Many airline companies talk about loyalty but do little to reciprocate their customers’ devotion. Want to return home earlier from a business trip? Well, you better be willing to risk getting aboard by going “standby” or you will have to pay a premium (which really feels like a “penalty”). Where have all the pillows gone? Meals are a thing of the past in coach too. You can purchase food or a snack where this was once part of the experience (albeit not all that favorable). Now they also charge us for our luggage. How do they expect one to travel, without luggage? (They’re currently contemplating charging for carry-on.) Go ahead and try to use your frequent flyer miles. (“Sorry sir but there is no availability for that location on that date. But for another x-miles we may be able to get you there.”) At least they can provide us with on-time departures and arrivals. But you can probably count on one hand the number of times they have met either on-time schedule. And, if they do arrive early (which isn’t all that hard given the large fudge factor they build-in) you are lucky if

your gate is open. They will keep you out on the tarmac until they squander any gain in the arrival time that they may have managed to achieve.

Can you honestly say you love your airline? Chances are that unless it is one of the leading Asian airlines the answer is a resounding “NO.” The only thing that keeps you attached to your airline is probably its loyalty program. However, chances are it is no longer a blind loyalty that they command. If the price isn’t right you’re taking a different airline. We do! About the only thing we love about our airline company is to beat-up on them to avenge the trials they subject us to. They’ve stopped caring about customers and courting them a long time ago.

Here are some simple questions to ask yourself to determine where you stand with your customers:

- Have you stopped talking with them as in changing sales call frequency or cutting advertising support? That doesn’t sound like love. Communication is absolutely essential to a strong relationship.
- Have you increased pricing without providing additional value? That’s one sided! It’s self-serving. It’s selfish. Who wants to be in a relationship with a selfish pig!?!
- Have you become predictable doing the same things in the same ways? There’s no spark in that kind of behavior. It’s so boring.
- Have you milked the brand allowing your competitors to catch-up and even surpass your brand offering? Complacency is never a positive in a relationship. It suggests you’ve stopped trying; you don’t care.
- Have you stopped doing for your customers things that had meaning to them? That’s depriving them of your affection. You’ve got to keep the fires burning if you are to continue to enjoy a loving relationship. Everybody knows that!

Okay dude or dudess (whatever your gender), if you’ve answered “yes” to more questions than not your relationship with customers is in serious trouble and it accounts for why you are not feeling their love. If you want the relationship to last beyond a transaction (as in special promotional pricing) you need to make some important changes. If you want to renew the love as evidenced by creating and maintaining brand loyalty it’s time to realize your part in the decline in, or dissolution of, the relationship. Let’s get to work!

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

Before you can feel the love you need to get your and potential customers to care, really care. But as with love you need to care for your customers. We need to start by determining whom we are going to serve and do everything in our power to better serve them than our competitors. We need to make our customers the center of our universe our reason for being in business and, more specifically, marketing. By the way you can’t serve everyone. So don’t even try.

- **Communicate** – Share your values. Let your prospective customers know what you stand for. Show them what you can do for them. Recently one client stated we don't advertise. Interesting. Why not? I remember as a young boy seeing a print ad from the publisher McGraw-Hill. It showed an elderly bald man sitting in a chair looking out of the ad to the reader. The copy read something like this: "Why should I buy from you? I don't know who you are? I don't know your products? I don't know what you stand for." Perhaps, you don't need to advertise. But you do need to find a way to communicate a relevant, meaningfully differentiated benefit from competition to your potential customers. And, you need to communicate on a consistent basis.
- **Add-value to your offering** – Think about the "whole product" offering. The whole product is comprised of tangibles (i.e., ingredients, design, etc.) and intangibles (i.e., things outside of the physical product such as terms, services, etc.). The whole product establishes the experience you will provide to your customers. The experience you deliver will serve to make or break the relationship. If you are contemplating an increase in price think hard about what you can do to the whole product offering to enhance the perceived value for the customer.
- **Animate the Brand** – Don't do the same things in the same way. Make the brand positioning come to life with bold new marketing mix elements and/or tactics. Create excitement for the brand but not for its own sake. The excitement you create from animating your tactics must be consistent with and bring to life the brand positioning strategy. It will serve to encourage your customers to remain in the relationship and prospective customers to engage in it.
- **Invest in the Brand** – Keep up with the times. Imagine owning a property and not maintaining it. It will deteriorate and lose value. A brand is no different. We need to find ways to enhance it through product improvements, line extensions, special events, etc. Don't be static. If you do you'll obsolete yourself and your competitors will only be too happy to move in on the relationship and steal your customers.
- **Show them love** – We need to show (better yet, demonstrate) our love for our customers. How do you do that? Do what they like, where and when they like it. Don't make changes to suit yourself without finding out how your customers feel about these changes. Don't take away amenities they have come to count on and that distinguish your offering from the competition. Keep the things that work for them. And as pointed out in the previous point give them new things that they will value and differentiate your brand from all other suitors.

Examine your relationship with your customers. Find out how they really feel about your brand. Regardless of the situation find a way to improve it. Keep in mind there are other suitors out to woo your customers away from your brand.

Find somebody to love and care! Work on the relationship. Feel the love

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The next OPEN BRAND POSITIONING & COMMUNICATIONS is coming up in two weeks, April 27-29, 2010 in Kansas City, Missouri. We can accommodate only a couple more in this session. Please contact Lori Vandervoort in the Central Division Office right away if you are interested. 800-255-9831 (620-431-0780)



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