

Want to Land Your Brand? Deliver a Great Experience.

By Karen Post

How does Starbucks get away with charging \$3.50 for a cup of coffee when there's plenty of good coffee for a lot less all over town? Yes, their product is good, but the driver in their brand success is about delivering a consistent experience that the market values and will pay for.

Your brand or any brand for that matter is the sum of all you do. It's something you earn over time by how you behave and treat your market or customers. Your brand is the mental imprint that you plant in your market's head. Like a brain tattoo, it's what your market thinks when they see one of your ads, it's how they feel when they hear your name and it's what they expect when they select you over one of your competitors.

So many organizations miss the branding boat. They think the brand starts and stops with the product or service they offer. Those are important factors, but many buyers quickly lose sight of product features and instead deeply store the memories of the experience you deliver.

A brand experience is the journey, the adventure, the trip you send your customers on when they decide to check you out and or do business with you. And it also includes the experience after they buy.

There are many branding opportunities you can leverage to land your brand. Start by mapping out all the points of contact your buyers have with your brand. If your brand of focus is your company, then ask yourself what activities happen when customers do business with you? Do they call you? Visit you? Do you visit them? Do they meet you at a trade show? If so, then the following should be explored: your customer service center, phone contact, your office environment, your presentation and your trade show presence. If you have a product brand, take a look at your distribution points of contact. Are they retail, Internet or direct sales? Whatever your path of contact, put yourself in those shoes. How does it feel? Good? Or like a nightmare?

Does the experience tap into all the senses of the buyer? Does it resonate through by touch, scent, sight, feel and sound?

Think about Starbucks again. The experience they offer includes a very cool, hip environment; cozy chairs; great jazz tunes; the smell of robust coffee; the choice of several intellectual periodicals; informative literature about their product; buyer-friendly merchandise displays and a friendly, well-informed staff.

Your brand personality, purpose and market position should direct the experience you offer. And remember the brand is not only about impacting the buyer of your offering. It's about your employees, who are your brand champions; the media, who can be brand cheerleaders; and the stakeholders, who need confidence to keep the resources coming.

Consider your environment.

Is it consistent with your brand? Are you selling high-tech innovation and your retail store looks like 1960 stopped in time? Is your brand about hip fashion and is your staff dressed in dated garb?

Think about your customer contact.

Is it supportive of your "We truly care; we are the friendly company"? Or is your phone system obnoxiously annoying, and is your receptionist rude and mumbles all the time?

Most businesses have three stages of contact to infuse a great experience: before customers buy, while they are buying and after they buy. What can you do to make the experience great?

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Bring the brand to your employees; enlist their ideas on adding experience.
- Whatever you decide, train and communicate to the troops and offer incentives to them to deliver it.
- Develop things you can give your customers that are about giving value, not selling.
- Breathe brand in your behind-the-scenes operation areas. Employees who get it will deliver it.
- Think about all the senses and how you can tap into them.
- Be the customer for a day and go through your buying experience.
- Talk to your customers even when they are not buying. Send thank-you notes and birthday cards. Know their names and what they value.

In today's competitive business world, there are many good companies vying for the same customers, singing the same song and pitching the same products. Deliver a memorable experience that solidifies your brand and customers will pay more for your offering and stick with you for a lifetime.

About the author

Karen Post, The Branding Diva™, is an author, national speaker and consultant on branding, marketing and communication issues. For nearly 20 years she has provided branding counsel and communication programs for individuals; start-ups; local, regional and national companies; politicians; and nonprofit organizations. For more information contact Karen Post at kp@brandingdiva.com or visit her at www.brandingdiva.com.
