

Understanding The Demanding Customer

*They Are Here to Stay - After All, You Keep Attracting Them!
But will they agree to stay with your brand and, if so, at what cost?*

By Alain J Roy

CUSTOMERS ARE GETTING MORE AND MORE DEMANDING, that's for certain. The reason behind this ever-increasing phenomenon may be attributed to the success of your marketing campaign and company slogans. Or could this be accredited to the fact that marketers are not telling the truth?

If your company's theme sounds anything like: "*We Try Harder*" – "*Satisfaction Guaranteed*" – "*We are the Best*" – "*The Customer is King*" – "*Quality is Job One*" – "*We Never Stop Working for You*" – "*Come Fly The Friendly Skies*" – "*We Do It Your Way,*" chances are your customers will expect it! Unfortunately, several companies are falling short on their marketing promises and the blame for the resulting losses is usually directed at the front-line employees or, more often than not, at the so-called "demanding customer."

Taking a close look at what the consumer came to expect and what was received will, in most cases, reveal an incongruity. As a result, the relationship [*set aside "trust factor"*] between customer and company may be forever broken. The creative and enticing tag lines presented by marketers in an effort to attract new customers and build relationships with such customers are, all too often, subverting them to the waiting arms of the competitors!

Marketing executives, business managers and consultants have the same goals in mind: attracting new customers, developing meaningful relationships that will yield both the economic benefits of customer retention and the revenue-generating rewards of customer loyalty. As companies [*marketing department*] develop more or crafty ways to attract new customers, they sometimes fail to understand and address their basic customer needs and expectations. In fact, many even fail to identify their key [*read: would-be-loyal*] customers in the first place! As a result, many customers never return and the company is forced to dream up new ways, new slogans and promises that will allow them the opportunity to attract additional customers. The cycle is re-created and the relationship/trust factor broken once again. Needless to say, the economic losses are considerable and, to make matters even worse, they become perpetual. So, what can you do to break this cycle and achieve your customer satisfaction and customer retention goals? The following steps will give you an edge in creating a more positive employee-customer interaction.

First: *Tell them the truth; then deliver what you promised:*

What if a company developed a slogan that communicated a simple message designed to attract customers with the goal of simply offering to fill the customers' basic needs and expectations? In this scenario, the marketing message conveys what the company can sincerely offer and the customer [*lured by a truthful message*] gets what he/she expected - no more, no less. As a result, the customer would be likely to return (at least, from time to time) and the company's economic trend would begin to reverse.

Second: *Constantly deliver on your promises and give them more than what they expected:*

We all know that a "totally satisfied" customer is very likely to return and even pay premium prices. We also know that this particular customer may provide your company with free "word-of-mouth" promotion, which of course is an effective way to cut costs and increase customer base and revenues.

Would it be logical then to spend less in marketing per se and invest in employee-customer relations in an effort to improve service delivery, customer satisfaction, and increase customer base?

Would this form of "face-to-face" marketing have a positive impact on the customer and overall business performance?

Would the company feel the need to tell a story other than the one now experienced and communicated by the customer?

By now, we can all see where the company's economic trend reversal is taking place. A portion of the marketing dollars is funneled to the improvement of "Employee-Customer" relations, the company message is delivered "on-the-spot" and in a compelling manner. The so-called "demanding" customer is now receiving a lot more than what he/she expected and had been promised.

Translation, the now "totally satisfied" customer spends more, returns frequently, and tells friends and family. Your company image improves and customer base grows. Operations are simplified [*read: less customer complaints, improved employee performance/satisfaction, diminished turnaround, and management workload is considerably reduced*]. Revenues begin to increase as costs drastically decrease!

Your company image is a by-product of the customer experience

The fundamental lesson learned is that the most valuable marketing message is not the one concocted at the company's headquarters or at some remote marketing agency, but it is the one created, believed, and delivered by the front-line employees. Whether good or bad, this is exactly what the customer will remember and convey to others. Your company image is a by-product of the customer experience and sometimes a "far cry" from the message once delivered via a marketing campaign or company slogan. In short, true and honest marketing [the new company image – its genuine motto] in this case, would evolve at the source. Propaganda in its purest form - You (and your customers) promote what you are!

In conclusion, in order to achieve the above, find out what the customer experience really is, what his/her views and opinion of your company translate to¹ and then, engage in the development of a marketing campaign [*Employee-Customer Relations*] that will become absolute evidence of such a REALITY.

Like it or not, the customer is talking about you – telling a story that will affect your reputation, growth and profitability [*read: improve or disrupt*]. In all honesty, would you say that this approach would help or stunt the growth of your company? Whatever the case, the story - as communicated by the customer - must be positive for the issues of reputation, growth, and profitability to coincide.

¹ Are You Listening To What the Customer Is NOT Saying? - Alain J Roy (<http://www.alainjroy.com/articles.html>)



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