MARKETING FOR DUMMIES?

BUILD IN QUALITY CONTROL

Introduction

Creating a positive Brand Presence in today's marketplace is now more critical then ever before. Customers, who can readily access information about products and services through the internet, are better informed and more connected than at any time in the past. They can easily compare product functionality, reliability, prices, or any number of other attributes. They can even quickly perform informal on-line surveys about the experiences others have had with a company, product, or service.

To create successful marketing campaigns and positive brands, it's not enough to deliver a reasonable product at a fair price. In this marketplace it's about making an emotional connection with the customer and creating a positive customer "experience". A single bad experience with a company or its products can now have an immediate impact on its brand reputation. Think how quickly the bloggers impacted CBS and Dan Rather.

Align Business Process with Brand Promise:

Your company must have a well-defined Brand Platform that clearly articulates its brand vision to establish and maintain a strong Brand Presence in this new fast-paced and information rich marketplace. But that's not enough. You is must deliver what your brand promises in all customer encounters. This means all employees, shareholders, and partners must know what the company stands for as well as how to represent it in the marketplace. Providing training and incorporating the principles of your Brand Platform into your business process enables you align your corporate resources with your Brand Vision.

There are four key aspects to a quality program.

Identify Key Brand Agents

The CEO or owner must define the "outside" of the organization, i.e. the "brand." However, everyone in your company that interfaces with customers, suppliers, partners, or competitors has the responsibility to deliver an experience that satisfies the Brand Promise.

For example, if part of your company's brand is a 'no questions asked' return policy then employees handing returns needs to know this and treat customers returning merchandise accordingly. If your company stresses state of the art technology, then your engineers need to be technology wizards. If your company's edge is its good working relationships in partnerships, then your staff needs to work well with others.

Provide Training

Management needs to make the time to ensure your company's core values are understood by everyone and to articulate the key elements that differentiate your brand, whether customer service, safety, performance, clean restrooms, or return policy.

Implement training programs to ensure that everyone in the company understands what the brand stands for, how their behavior can impact it, and how to implement it. The training should

emphasize the experiential aspects of a customer's interaction with your company. Everyone's behavior needs to be compatible with the core values.

For example, if your company places a high value on customer service, then customer service representatives need to know this so that they can properly handle situations as they arise. If you pride yourself on reliability of your products, then your engineers, manufacturing team, and quality control folks all need to know this so that they can make the necessary tradeoffs among competing design and production factors.

Your training program should also instruct employees on how to represent the brand appropriately in all forms of communication – written, electronic, telephone, presentations or face-to-face.

Additionally, training can include: techniques for dealing with difficult people, efficiently and effectively using software packages, the importance of good e-mail etiquette, project management, and leadership.

Develop Appropriate Scripts

Anyone who answers the telephone must know how to do it appropriately, just as anyone with email access needs to understand the important role email now plays in corporate communications. A customer service representative that answers the telephone needs a clear set of messages, and well defined procedures for how to handle specific situations. Develop scripts for both incoming and outgoing telemarketing that ensure a consistent message is delivered. Develop a system for customer support personnel to log customer complaints and comments. Then you can systematically address issues that are raised.

Beware that messages can be either explicit or implicit. Explicit messages are what is actually said and done. Implicit messages are created by the context, presentation, or behaviors around the message. For example, you may be saying "I'm happy to serve you" but your tone of voice may conveyed that you are really annoyed.

And don't overlook more general market exposure -- engineers may represent the company in standards bodies, at conferences, or as technical support for the sales team. Employees may be involved in volunteer or community activities. These kinds of interactions also impact how your brand is perceived.

Create "Branded" Templates for Use on the Desktop

With the ubiquitous nature of desktop publishing and the "do it yourself" nature of business communications today, everyone is involved in creating "branded" materials. Sales people, engineers, and management often create their own written and presentation materials. Unfortunately, all too often they have received no training in the basics of design, the use of the software, or even how to write such materials. They also may not understand the importance of creating a clear, consistent image. They may sprinkle irrelevant clip art on PowerPoint slides.

Making good templates for the creation of presentations and documents available on everyone's desktop will greatly enhance their quality and consistency. In addition to providing templates, basic training on how to use the software, guidelines for color, and libraries of clip art and images will improve the consistency and professionalism of your materials. A lot can be done to create distinctive materials by providing a small library of clip-art that is consistent with your brand image.

In addition to improving the overall look and consistency of your materials, sharing templates among employees will save significant amounts of time in creating them. Documents, graphics,

and presentations created by one person can easily be used by someone else without the need to retype or reformat.

Monitor Quality

It's one thing to provide training, scripts and templates. It only works if you make sure that people use them! Implement some simple procedures that make everyone accountable for maintaining the value of the brand. For example:

- Require that every presentation be read by someone familiar with the brand guidelines, before it is given

- Insist that all material posted on the corporate web-site be approved by the brand manager

- Ensure that every new employee is mentored in brand implementation

- Arrange for someone you know to randomly call your sales force or customer service organization

- Encourage management to randomly talk to employees to see if they understand the brand promise and actively attempt to implement it

- Ask everyone in your company to make suggestions on how to more efficiently and effectively implement the Brand Promise

Reward Fulfillment of the Brand Promise

You need to let everyone know that senior management values the fulfillment of the Brand Promise. If you don't make it clear that 'living the Brand' is important, no amount of training and monitoring will give the desired results.

- Create awards that reward excellence in delivering on the Brand Promise. Monetary rewards, such as a certificate for dinner for two, provide clear evidence that Brand is important.

- Publicize the fact that people have received awards for being "Brand Quality Agents."

- Include delivering on the Brand Promise as one of the evaluation areas for any performance review.

- Remind anyone who fails to deliver on the Brand Promise that such behavior is not looked upon favorably by senior management.

The Benefit

By formalizing the processes and standardizing tools to support it, your company can deliver a consistent brand experience that matches what it has promised the customer. And, somewhat surprisingly, you will eliminate unnecessary costs by building brand quality controls into your day to day business processes.

When everyone in your company realizes that they personally can have a positive effect on the success of your company and that you will reward them for it, they will take pride in 'living the brand'.

- - - - - - - -

This article is the sixth of a nine-part article series on branding called *The ABC's of Small Business Marketing* developed in conjunction with "The Business Owner" newsletter.

May-June 2004 Issue: *Your Marketing Message*: Back to the Drawing Board
July-Aug '04 Issue: *Avoid Marketing Mayhem*: Establishing Your Brand Vision
Sept-Oct '04 Issue: *Logo and Look*: Selecting the Visual Elements that Support Your Brand Vision
Nov-Dec '04 Issue: *Tag Lines and Ad Copy*: What You Say Should Support Your Brand Vision
Jan-Feb '05 Issue: *Guided Missile Marketing*: Selecting Mediums with Maximum Payload
Mar-April '05 Issue: *Marketing for Dummies*? Build in Quality Control
May-June '05 Issue: *Master Your Marketing*: Monitoring and Feedback Enable Continuous Improvement
July-Aug '05 Issue: *Creative Creatures:* Working with Marketing, PR and Ad Professionals
Sept-Oct '05 Issue: *Win the Marketing Game*: Be Proactive or Perish

David L.Perkins contributed his expertise to this article and the article series. Mr. Perkins is a business owner, investor, entrepreneur, and a passionate advocate for the private business owner. He owns, edits and publishes the newsletter The Business Owner, which provides basic business management information and know-how to owners of small and mid-size private businesses. The Business Owner has 25,000 paid subscribers and is also available on a private label basis