Keep your customers coming back for more: Your Brand

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The only thing your competition can't copy or under-price is your behavior, and how you serve your customers. THIS is what branding is about. And if you're not doing it, you're losing business. Period.

Managing your brand on purpose is the best thing you can do to keep your customers loyal, and coming back for more.

You have a brand whether or not you know it. If you want to find out what it is, just ask your customers:

What is your impression of us?
What do we always do consistently?
How does our sales process make you feel? What do you observe when we're selling?
How does the way we respond to problems make you feel?
What do you notice about the way we present ourselves? In our store? on our website?

The answers to these questions will tell you what your brand is.

Branding is one of the most misunderstood concepts in business.

Top 4 misunderstandings about branding:

1. Brand = Logo
2. Good brand = logo that you see a lot
3. Branding = spending a lot of money
4. You can tell people what your brand is

You can't "tell" people what your brand is. Your brand is a set of values granted to you by your customers based on their experience with you. And "You" means all your employees that touch the outside world.

The good news is that you have the opportunity to manage what you are known for - to build your brand on purpose. But it requires behaviors, not words.

Here are the steps to building a strong brand.

1. Stand for something: The best companies are the ones that are willing to stand or something. What is important to you?

   How are you and your company different from other people and other companies?
What can people expect from you no matter what?

Create a set of brand values that describe what you stand for.

This is a process very personal to a company and its leaders. It’s what sets you apart from your competition and other businesses. Take real time to do it. You can’t look up the answer.

It’s about who you are and what you stand for. Brand values are things like:

- Stable/reliable
- Caring
- Unstoppable energy
- Irreverent
- Hip
- Formal
- Green

What are your values? Document them and describe what they mean to you.

2. **Now here’s the important part.** You need to define behaviors that you will **DO**, that will demonstrate these brand values to the world.

Remember you can’t tell people your brand, you need to live it. Some examples:

1. **If you have a brand value of being green**, you’ll want to assess all of your processes and use of energy, paper, water, etc. and put in place specific practices which support this.
   - How you pack, how you ship, etc. Then find ways to let your customers know what you are doing to preserve the environment.

2. **If you have a brand value of "hip"** - you’ll want to tune your website, your lobby, your written communications, your customer services processes, all to have a flair that demonstrate your "hip-ness" - playing elevator music in your store (or on your phone hold) won’t cut it.
   - Nor will having long boring, processes to make a return or request information. If you’re going to be hip. Be hip in all you do.

3. **Be consistent!**

   **There is nothing more damaging to your business than to deliver an inconsistent experience to your customers.**

   This is why it’s so important to define your brand - so you can do it on purpose, all the time.

   Here is an example. There was a shop I went into, and they made me feel wonderful. They were attentive, complementary, went out of their way to help me find things that would suit me. The second time I went there, I had a similar experience. The third time I went there, I was treated like crap. They were downright rude.

   The first two experiences built up a "promise" in my mind about their brand - "excited about giving their customers a fun and successful experience". The last visit was a huge let down. It would have been less of a let down, if they hadn’t
built up a "promise" of fun and useful experience in the first visits. I don't go there anymore.

When you give people a consistent experience, they become comfortable and confident and they will choose to do business with you over and over again, vs. going somewhere else where the experience is unpredictable.

In fact, consistency is the most important thing you can do to create this kind of loyalty.

Here's the point:

If you don't define and manage your brand on purpose, establish "brand-able" behaviors, and train all of your employees on the processes to deliver your brand values, you have no hope at delivering a consistent experience to your customers.

Don't leave how you are perceived to chance.

Finally, back to the key point made earlier.

Your behaviors are the ONLY thing you competition can't copy.

Building your brand is your opportunity to create a special, consistent experience for your customers that will keep them coming back and referring you to more customers. Even if your competition lowers prices, or introduces new products and services, consistency is what will keep your customers coming back to you.

Define your brand. Live it. Do it on Purpose. Customers will reward you for it.

Patty Azzarello was the youngest person to become a general manager at Hewlett Packard at the age of 33. She ran a $1B global software business at the age of 35, and became a CEO for the first time at the age of 38. A few of her roles were the VP and General Manager of HP OpenView, CEO of Euclid Software, and Chief Marketing Officer for Siebel Systems.

Patty is the CEO of Azzarello Group, www.AzzarelloGroup.com a unique services organization focused on helping business leaders actually get done what they want to do, and get a bigger payoff from their hard work. Azzarello Group delivers practical, experience-based tools to business leaders, through products and services including articles, e-books, mentoring programs, executive coaching, public speaking, small business retreats, and business execution workshops.

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