



ideas

IT ISN'T EASY BEING GREEN

Now is a wonderful time for companies to offer an environmentally friendly product or service. Political, environmental and economic concerns have created a marketplace that's receptive to the idea of going green. But, before you proclaim your credentials from the treetops, consider these five rules of green marketing:

- Not everyone shares the same concerns. Be sure your audience is aware of the issue your product or service addresses, and wants to do something about it.
- Explain how your product makes a difference. No one wants to feel their contribution is a drop in the ocean, so provide a compelling demonstration of its environmental benefits—whether on an individual or collective basis.
- Pre-empt scepticism with transparency. Make it easy for customers to see your commitment is genuine. "Consumers must believe in the legitimacy of your product and the specific claims you are making."
- Position your product as a high-quality alternative. Reassure customers that it performs at least as well as trusted products from your not-as-green competitors.
- Consider the impact of premium pricing. Customers might understand why your product or service costs more, but that doesn't mean they can afford the extra outlay—or that they think it's worth it.

The Point: "A strong commitment to environmental sustainability in service and product design and manufacture can yield significant opportunities to grow your business, to innovate and to build brand equity." But do your homework before diving in.

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Editors insight

BACK TO THE FUTURE HOW TO INNOVATE FOR CUSTOMERS: TRY RE-INNOVATING

I was listening to a friend recently and he said "We used to send a 'thank you' card to a new customer on completion of our first delivery. It was the most popular communication we sent, bringing back really positive feedback. The other day we discovered that we don't do it anymore. With all the new things we have to do we forgot about it."

Here is a learning point. If you're looking for ways to improve, look backwards as well as forwards: is there anything your organisation stopped doing that is worth resurrecting? It is no different to driving. A good driver always knows what is happening in their rear vision mirror.

In the rush to be innovative, the excitement of new ideas can blind you to the fact that some of the old ones may have worked but been abandoned or forgotten. Past practices can be a great source of "new" old ideas – You can call it "re-innovation".

When a successful organisation slips and need to get back their winning ways the answer can sometimes be found by looking back to see where you have strayed from your winning formula. But take care, when trying this 'back to the future' approach to innovation; be aware, that the market may have changed so much your winning formula no longer has relevance.

SKY HIGH SERVICE – RICHARD BRANSON'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

With the arrival in New Zealand of Richard Branson's influence in the guise of Pacific Blue it is interesting to consider some of the guiding principles that have made "Virgin" and its co-partners a force in world wide aviation

I recently travelled to Wellington and return on Pacific Blue. The experience was refreshing. The staff were committed to their customers and communicated warmth at every level.

Some years ago Richard Branson gave his managers a list of his guideline principles. After flying Pacific Blue I retrieved the list and here are some of his principles.

- We must meet the passenger on his or her terms. They are individuals and require different things.
- As a rule we should be friendly and informal but always taking account of what the individual wants.
- Other airline staff are hidebound by rules. We should give our staff guidelines that encourage them to solve a passenger's problem.
- Mistakes are inevitable; dissatisfied customers are not.
- Our staff should be happy, cheerful, smiling, friendly and enjoying their job. It is a Manager's job to motivate their staff. Their role is to support their people in doing their best for the Passenger. Money is not the answer, good leadership is.
- We must give our staff responsibility and authority. Responsibility is the obligation to act, not just accept the blame. Authority is the resources to deal with the situation.
- We want our staff to anticipate a Passenger's problem. Think beyond the immediate; recognise the implications of their actions.
- We must communicate with our staff. If we change things we must tell them and tell them why.
- We must listen to what our staff have to say and act on it. If we can't do it we must say why not.
- We must improve in line with our culture, not at the expense of it.

Over the two sectors I flew with Pacific Blue the behaviour of both ground and in-flight services reflected these concepts.

As you scan the list you will appreciate its simplicity. These are the basic concepts of behaviour that apply to any customer service situation and they are all within the control of the manager.

Think about the list. How does it apply to your organisation? How do you checkout?

HOW TO HAMMER YOUR POINTS HOME

Before you start writing to a customer, establish the ideas you want to plant in the reader's head. Prioritise your points and ensure that every word advances your cause. Some guidelines:

Think small. Use short words that people understand. Showing off your vocabulary with too many foreign phrases or technical terms can turn off readers.

Exercise: After completing your draft, circle words with more than two syllables and replace them.

Write bite-sized chunks. Short, elegant sentences grab readers' attention. Beware of trying to pack too much into a sentence.

Exercise: Review your draft and replace most commas, dashes or colons with full stops.

Read it aloud. As long as the words sound natural coming out of your mouth, you're safe. If your writing forces you to talk in a stiff bureaucratic tone, go back and revise.

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HOW MUCH SERVICE IS TOO MUCH SERVICE

People often ask, 'What level of service should we strive to provide? Should we give "Unbelievable!" service if our customers are not willing to pay for it?'

The answer is definitely no!

Don't go over the top on service if your business model doesn't demand it. No sense 'serving your customers to death', bending over backwards and going broke in the process.

As a first step you need to discover what level of service your business can and must provide to match with what your customers are willing to pay.

Take note: customers rarely put voluntary limits on their service expectations. That's why making clear service agreements is so important to you and your customers.

You must clearly communicate to the customer what you promise to provide.

The manager of a communication provider recently made this complaint:

His staff go into customers' homes and offices to install modems and communications software. They then train the customer to access e-mail and other online services

Frequently, before his staff leave, office-based customers start asking questions about unrelated hardware, new software upgrades and suggestions on how to fix non-working printers!

Home customers insist on asking for help in installing new games and debugging new versions of Windows, and even assistance repairing their kids Nintendo!

When staff explain that they are an "Internet Service Provider", not a computer repair service', customers develop a hearing complaint. As far as his customers are concerned, 'You are the computer people, and we have a computer problem. Now that you are here, can you fix it?'

One look at his brochure reveals the source of the problem. It reads: 'Enter the digital age! Modernise your life! Capture the computer advantage!' Plenty of encouragements to buy, but no clear and detailed listing of the actual service promise.

To eliminate the problem, the company needs to clarify and specify what services they do provide - and what services they do not.

So make sure the service agreements you make with customers are complete and clear. Misunderstanding can lead to disappointment.

Check with your customers and your staff. Find out where misunderstanding and disagreements arise. Then examine your proposals, contracts and service level agreements. If there is uncertainty, replace it with accuracy, clarity and understanding.

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THE IMPACT OF CULTURE – ON THE CUSTOMERS EXPERIENCE OF PHONE SERVICE

Does every one of your team members know your organisation's vision of what the customer's telephone experience must be? Notice I say "must" and not "should".

Important questions for you...

- Is that "vision" fuzzy?
- Is that vision open for negotiation?
- What happens if a team member violates that vision?

Can you name the most important customer service experience Touch Point in organisation?

(Hint – It's where the most "traffic" goes)

- Yes. You are correct. The telephone is your most important customer service tool.
- Through every telephone conversation your customer has with one of your team members – they are forming a "brand perception".
- Are you leaving your brand to chance?
- Another question. If the most important customer service resource or focus point is the telephone, then why do so few organisations really spend the time, energy, and resources hiring the right people and setting the telephone customer service vision or tone?
- If you really want to "fix" your phone customer service experience, you must get serious about it. Here are steps on how to "get serious" about telephone customer service.

Decide. Decide you aren't going to accept mediocrity when it comes to telephone customer service. Don't allow people to answer your phone who aren't in alignment with your organisation's vision of what the telephone customer experience must be.

Create a vision statement. If you don't have an easy to understand, gut-grabbing vision of where you are going and if it isn't simple enough for people to understand quickly – then stop your "bus" right now and create a passionate vision statement.

Love the one you are with. Help your team members see your vision of your phone customer service experience. If you get blank stares or "starry eyes" then take those people off the phones.

Life is about energy. You either give or you take. If your team members are taking it from customers through the telephone, put an end to it. Your team members are there to give your customers energy – so that they want to call back and continue doing business with you.

Personal Accountability. You are in trouble if you are hearing questions like, "Who dropped the ball? When is that department going to do their job? When will that department communicate better?"

We are here to serve!

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IDEAS FOR FINDING NEW CUSTOMERS

Follow up after meetings: Contact the people you've met to see if they may be prospects. If they say they don't need your services now, ask when a good time to call them back would be, or if they have business associates who could use what you sell now.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Quality relationships are built on principles – especially the principle of trust