

Creating Emotional Bonds

I visited an Apple Store the other day and waited outside 'til they opened. When I entered, the entire Apple crew was arrayed from front to back along each side of the store and facing the front. They all clapped when the doors were opened. Clapped for me and the other customers who entered. Hokey? Maybe. Effective? You judge. I found myself helplessly grinning from ear to ear. Once more, I encountered another way to love Apple.

For me, Apple is cool. Not just easy to use and free from viruses, but cool. I am emotionally connected to this company and its products. Me, someone who prides myself on being a careful decision maker, weighing the value of products I buy.

No Such Thing as Purely Rational Decisions

Well the truth is I am not all that rational about decisions, and I would submit neither are you, nor are any of your clients and their customers. Antonio Damasio is a renowned researcher of the neural basis of human behavior and sites in the brain that process emotions. When these sites have been destroyed through accident, for example, people can no longer make decisions. Individuals might be able to rationally discuss the pros and cons of two choices, but when asked which is preferred, cannot make the apparent logical choice. Put simply, without emotions we cannot make decisions.

Advertisers have long courted consumers with appeals to their hearts; that's not news. What has been neglected, however, is that consumers also form emotional connections to most everything around them, including a piece of computer hardware or even a hamburger experience. In-N-Out restaurants has developed emotionally bonded customers who order from an underground menu known to them and to employees, but not published anywhere – a burger “Animal Style” anyone?

Emotional Experience

The next area of opportunity for marketers is to ask, “How can we purposefully invoke desired emotional bonds in the customer experience?”

This is about going beyond brand and marketing communications – this reaches to making the brand come alive by emotionally bonding the

customer during the actual interactions customers have with the store, the product, the call center, or any touchpoint that drives customer advocacy.

I was recently on a Southwest Airlines flight to Las Vegas, the once and perhaps still haven of Elvis Presley. The flight attendant did the mandatory announcements before take off, sung to the tune of “Blue Suede Shoes.” He was really good; and the entire planeload of passengers clapped. There’s that clapping again; an emotional response.

I LUV® Southwest. They give me peanuts, a good price, and I can select my own seat. And it is the only airline on which I can say I ever had a good time. They know that I choose them not just because I rationally weigh their cost and value, but because of something more. They have my heart.

The world is an experience filled with emotions, and the good news is marketers are starting to wake up to how companies can enrich our experiences, bringing out positive emotions in us, appealing to us through not just what we rationally value, but through how we actually are wired as human beings.

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