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Customer Experience Management Improves Brand Value

by Lynn Hunsaker

You're only as strong as your weakest link. You may be gambling your brand equity if the weakest links leading to the end-customer's experience aren't managed. Have you analyzed your business processes in terms of customer touchpoint value chains, to identify reliability risks and strengthen your weakest links? Here are three tips for managing your brand value:

1) What is Your Brand Value Chain?

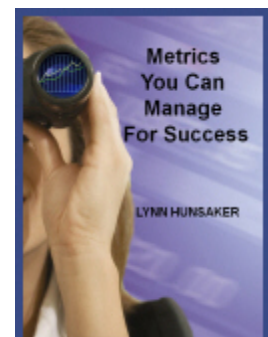
It's common to think of customer touchpoints as finite contacts between front-line employees and customers, with emphasis on sales and service functional areas. Other touchpoints may include billing, shipping/delivery, distributors, executive interactions, ads, promotions, tradeshow, receptionists, administrative assistants, and perhaps many other functional areas, depending on your type of business. The value chain that delivers on each customer touchpoint may extend deep into your company, and perhaps to your suppliers. A typical customer experience value chain is cross-functional and encompasses a number of handoffs. Are the owners of those handoffs aware of how they affect the customer experience? Working backward from the customer touchpoint, does each business process owner proactively monitor the quality of their deliverables?



2) How do Customers View the Value Chain?

Now that you've broadened your definition of customer touchpoints, get a thorough understanding of how customers view each touchpoint. After all, one bad apple can spoil the barrel. Get a fresh idea of what customer expect and how they interpret a touchpoint. Use open-ended questions wherever possible to avoid superficial, disconnected surveys that won't be valuable to you or your customers. Among other things, you may find that the Web 2.0 phenomenon — two-way communication with brands anywhere, anytime, by anybody (both online and offline) — has really changed customers' ideas of how they should get and use information and services. Even for low-tech non-web brands, this phenomenon likely has carry-over effects on any customer's viewpoints.

3) **Who's Strengthening Weakest Links?** Once you've collected representative customer feedback, involve cross-functional teams along each customer touchpoint value chain in (1) owning their voice of the customer data and (2) making a concerted effort to improve their handoffs. This is essential to internal branding. Focus their attention on early warning signals that prevent delays, re-work, scrap, and shoddy deliverables. By tracking process inputs and in-process warning signals, you can avoid the garbage-in garbage-out realities that plague the reliability of the customer experience. Make sure everyone views this as an



integral part of their job, rather than nice-to-have tasks to do if they get the time for them.

If you want to boost your brand value, manage your weakest links for substantive results that can prevent negative buzz and customer churn. Don't gamble your brand equity on unreliable customer touchpoint value chains. Stronger links lead to word-of-mouth with an exponential effect on your marketing investments.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.