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Customer Experience Metaphors Offer a Wealth of Insights

by Lynn Hunsaker

Like radical, man, but everyone tends to talk in metaphors. A picture tells a thousand words, they say. And we all use 5-6 metaphors a minute, according to author Gerald Zeitman in his book "How Customers Think". So how much do you know about your customers' metaphors? The ones they use to describe your brand. The analogies they use to explain the customer experience. And different similes used by various market segments. Lots of companies are now exploring the customer experience through metaphors, including BofA, DuPont, Glaxo Wellcome, GM, Hallmark, HP, Immunex, Mercedes, Motorola, P&G and Samsung, among many others.

Everyone knows that most of communication is nonverbal ... they say upwards of 80%. Yet most techniques for capturing the voice of the customer tend to focus on verbal mechanisms. We typically measure conscious, verbal aspects of specific product and service elements. It's hard to tap into the 95% of thought, emotion and learning occur in the unconscious mind. And customers' stated likelihood of doing X is really misleading unless they've been able to specify the context of their decision-making. That context is a dynamic combination of physical, social and psychological settings and the customer's emotional state.



The good news is that metaphors get around all this! You can finally dig into the great unconscious. Context supporting predictability is at your fingertips. The vast nonverbal message is within your grasp. Metaphors, along with techniques like paired item response latency, stories and consensus mapping, have paid dividends for savvy companies. A highly differentiated competitive edge. Market share gains and new product and service revenue streams. And re-channeling efforts from things that don't make a dent to things that grow profit.

Metaphor research is extremely valuable for positioning and improving customer experiences. It's a constructive approach that taps into the unconscious and nonverbal, as well as the various experiences that surround the product. I recommend it as an essential augmentation of typical product/service-specific conscious verbal research. How to do metaphor research? Author Gerald Zeitman generously provides useful techniques in the mid-section of his book "How Customers Think".

Try talking to a friend for 5 minutes without using metaphors. They're part and parcel of how we see the world. They're at the heart of our thinking. Heck, I can hardly write a sentence that sidesteps a metaphor. This approach to VOC and CEM has certainly been eye-opening!

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