

Make your customer "feel" your brand

Leverage the power of New Media communications!

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Competition is fierce in the market place today irrespective of what industry you are in. Many companies are offering similar products and services, and the gap in brand differentiation is difficult to define. A clear example is to take a conscious tour of your local supermarket and browse through the aisles. Regardless of whether it's snack foods, breakfast cereals or shampoo, the competition out there is as keen as ever.

Companies have to look at other aspects rather than just product attributes in order to regain the competitive edge and to ensure prolonged sustainability of their respective brands. **Brand experience** is not a new thing and yet it has the potential to wield a positive effect on customers and their experience, building a reputation for pleasing them with quality products or services.

So what is brand experience all about?

As the name suggests it's the experience the customer develops by engaging with the brand as a consumer of a product or service. From this experience an attitude is formed of the brand. Disappoint the customer and the brand attitude is negative. Delight the customer and it is positive. Leverage and follow through on that positive attitude and you have yourself a potential brand loyalist.

So how do you get your customers to actually "feel" your brand?

Like people, brands have the ability to develop personalities and values. These personalities and values are what make us unique. Think of it as developing and nurturing a relationship between your brand and your customer just as it would for people. Get your customers involved and proactively engaging with your brand.

Let's take a look at a globally recognised fast food brand. To their customers this fast-food chain is not about real-estate or selling food. To them it is a place where they can expect cleanliness; a consistent menu, convenience and a child-friendly environment. Kids can get a toy with their meal purchase and parents can be guaranteed 'quiet time' while their kids play, letting them catch up with their weekend reading over breakfast. From an individual's perspective, it could be seen as a nanny/butler who would cook, clean, and look after the kids whilst keeping them entertained.

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Now the **brand experience** story doesn't end here. Take the Kid's Meal target audience for example, they play a serious role in the decision-making of fast-food meals that often carries across to the rest of the family. These tiny decision-makers often have a positive effect over the gatekeepers. Fast forward twenty years, these same people would have developed a favourable **brand experience**, could remain brand loyal and become group influencers. The brand's perceived value hinges on what happens before and after the purchase, not just during, which in turn should result in good word-of-mouth advertising.

Brand attitude has to be communicated in order to create a **brand experience**. Taking your message to the market today requires the use of an integrated communications approach to address the customer at all contact points. The communications objective is to connect and engage the customer, to open the door for them to touch, look, hear and sense your brand. Some marketers talk about creating a 'mood' associated with the brand. This 'mood' IS the **brand experience**.

Taking a step back, in order to create the brand experience it is necessary to understand the customer, to step into their world. Gaining firsthand experience is ideal – to understand the interaction between the customer, product/service, the environment and how their decisions are influenced is invaluable. From an internal perspective it is about removing the invisible barrier between your brand and your customers in order to get closer to them. As communication is a two way process it is equally important to consider channels and means for your customers to interact with your brand.

Direct Marketing agencies have an advantage on the **brand experience** battleground due to their speciality in understanding customer insights – their ability to interpret and develop strategies to move another step closer to their customers. Driven by these insights and integrating them with more traditional marketing methods, companies are able to develop powerful and solid strategies. Strategies with smart creative that not only cuts through the clutter, but also seeks to **build long term relationships**, that develop into **brand loyalty and advocacy**, making it harder for competitors to shift their position.

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