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## Five practical steps for building a stronger brand

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*Customers experience brands in many ways, whether through the product itself, the packaging, the price, your marketing and communications, or your staff. But while some of these have an obvious impact, others (like monthly statements and support desks) can have a more subtle effect on branding, according to Scott Glatstein, president of US-based customer experience consultancy Imperatives.*

A brand's image creates expectations in the customer's mind, and goes a long way toward defining what the brand is, what the company stands for, how the company operates, and how the company is different from its competitors. In essence, Glatstein warns, the brand's image is a promise that has to be kept.

### **Fulfilling the brand's promise**

"If the brand is a promise you make, then the customer experience is the fulfilment of that promise," explained Glatstein. "The customer experience can't be left to chance, either. It should be actively designed and controlled in a manner that enhances your brand image. It must consistently reinforce the brand promise across every customer touchpoint or the value of the brand itself is at risk."

### **Five recommendations**

Glatstein's five recommended steps toward building a stronger brand and a finely tuned customer experience are:

#### **1. Identify your 'reasons to believe'**

Your brand promise is irrelevant if your customers do not believe it. So the promise must be supported by reasons to believe. This will automatically add substance to the promise and define specific expectations for the customer.

For example, if an automobile manufacturer promises potential customers that their cars are an intelligent choice for serious drivers, what makes it an intelligent choice? Why should the customer believe the promise? To address this question, the manufacturer could frame its promise with two reasons: perhaps sporty performance and passenger safety. These two reasons define "intelligent choice" and clearly set customer expectations. They also give the company a specific direction for setting up the right customer experience through vehicle design features, advertising campaigns, dealer sales approaches, and customer service activities.

#### **2. Identify customer touchpoints**

Each step in the business process contains a number of touchpoints when the customer comes in contact with the brand. The ultimate goal is to have each touchpoint reinforce and fulfil the brand's promise.

For example, how do you generate customer demand? How are products sold? How do your customers use your products? How do you provide after-sales support? This track-through of marketing, selling, and servicing processes allows the company to create a simple "touchpoint map" that defines customers' experiences with the brand.

### 3. **Determine the most influential touchpoints**

All touchpoints are not equal in impact. Some will naturally play a larger role in determining the overall customer experience.

For example, if the product is ice-cream, taste is probably going to be more important than package design. Both are touchpoints but each has a different effect on the customer experience as a whole. To determine the touchpoints driving customers' overall experience, the company could adopt a range of techniques from quantitative research to institutional knowledge. The methods used will depend on the complexity of the company's products, commercial processes, and existing knowledge base.

### 4. **Design the optimal experience**

Starting by looking at how to best express each reason to believe at each key touchpoint, starting with the most influential touch points. For example, how can you reinforce sporty performance in a car's product design, at the dealership, and in marketing campaigns?

### 5. **Align the company to consistently deliver that experience**

A holistic approach to aligning the whole organisation to consistently deliver the desired customer experience is essential. Identify the people, processes, and tools that drive each key touchpoint.

Look beyond employees that have direct contact with customers, and examine the role and impact of behind-the-scenes employees (product packers, dispatchers, administrators and so on). Similarly, the impact of workflow processes and tools (e.g. IT systems) on the customer experience may be less obvious but just as crucial to consistent delivery. And of course identify which activities don't align with the ideal customer experience, and examine ways to address them.

## **Conclusion**

Every product or service you bring to market yields a customer experience of some kind. But the question is: Is it the experience you intended? Does that experience fulfil the brand promise initially made to the customer?

By identifying the people, processes, and tools that drive the customer experience, you can actively design and control that experience and help to make it unique - a barrier to competition. But to make that happen, the brand promise you make must be kept at all times, across every customer touchpoint.

**More Info:** <http://www.imperativesllc.com>