



THE TEN PRINCIPLES BEHIND **GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES**



MATT WATKINSON

The Ten Principles Behind Great Customer Experiences

important to us' while I wait endlessly for them to answer. These sterile messages are totally void of any humanity. In a world dominated by shades of grey, adding a bit of colour can go a long way. A bit of personality might just be the difference that keeps your customers coming back.

Air New Zealand – serious fun

In a safety video for Air New Zealand called *Fit to Fly*, a wacky fitness instructor Richard Simmons turns the bland safety procedures into a kind of workout, featuring the captain of the All Black's rugby team among others. Not only does this make a refreshing change, critically it also makes the customer pay more attention to the important message. The video has gone on to become a YouTube hit with over two million views.¹⁷

Support rationale thinking

The most important conclusion from this chapter is that there is no such thing as rational thinking when it comes to consumer behaviour, only what Rob Walker, author of *Buying In*, cleverly calls *rationale thinking*.¹⁸ Walking down the aisle of the supermarket your inner monologue might go something like this: 'I don't need three of these but they are on special offer (puts in trolley) ... Oh yum cookies! I'm on a diet but these ones are gluten free and I've had a hard day (puts in trolley) ... I need some washing-up liquid ... Oh look this one is more environmentally friendly (puts in trolley).'

We continuously swap between different rationales when we buy and combine them at will, so to come out on top you've got to consider carefully which rationales will apply to your brand and communicate them unambiguously. This is of absolute importance, because it sets the tone for the whole customer experience that follows.

Patagonia

Patagonia are rightly the default example of green-blooded capitalism in action, owing to their absolute commitment to environmental and ethical commitments, but I can't help but feel that this is doing them a slight dis-service: it's not the only rationale for buying their stuff. The reality is they also happen to make products that are extremely well designed, incredibly high quality, and their customer service is excellent. To show they are the real deal, rather than just using good looking models in staged poses, they use photos of real people using their products in real situations in their catalogue. Whatever rationale you want to use, they've got it covered. The founder's book *Let My People Go Surfing* devotes a huge section to their product design philosophy,¹⁹ which I'm sure is central to their success. Few people care if something is eco-friendly if it's also useless: one rationale is rarely enough for anyone.

Build a brand reality, not a brand image

Once you have identified what rationales apply to your business, capture them in a form that can be easily communicated both internally to staff and externally to customers, and then make absolutely sure that they are delivered upon. In my career to date I have sat through countless brand presentations where teams have set out to create a centrally controlled brand image. Most of these miss the point: you need to build a brand reality, not a brand image. Create a great customer experience, and the brand value will look after itself.

John Lewis

How did the department store John Lewis become the darling of the high street? They make true on their commitment to be 'Never knowingly undersold on quality, on price and on service'.²⁰ Whichever branch you go into, whatever product you are buying, you know you are in safe hands.

Once you have decided on your rationales, you need to commit to them and they need to permeate every single element of the experience. These rationales are the foundation of the customer experience because they set our expectations. We usually become aware of a brand before we do business with them, either through advertising, looking at a website or a referral from a friend. The best way to set yourself up to succeed is to make sure that the initial expectations that are set through marketing or branding can be delivered upon.

Summary

- Wants are a more powerful motivator than needs.
- Social groups define themselves through their consumption.
- Everything we buy reflects our values, beliefs and self-image.
- Great customer experiences help us resolve the tension between expressing our individuality and belonging to a group.
- Think about what your brand says about your customers.
- Focus on creating a brand reality rather than a brand image – this is the foundation of a great customer experience.

5

Great customer experiences satisfy our higher objectives

In a movie, what makes each character interesting are the objectives hidden beneath what they say or do. Customers are no different: wants and needs are derivative, it is satisfying the higher objective behind them that is the foundation on which great experiences are built. This chapter will show you how to model customer objectives in a way that will open up new opportunities for improvements, and help you get your customer experience right at a product or service level.

People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill, they want a quarter-inch hole! THEODORE LEVITT

The basic purpose of any product or service is to help the customer to satisfy an objective. Customers have goals, and successful products help them to achieve their goals, so before we can make the experience as great as possible, we need to know what this end state looks like. If we are to create a satisfying product or service we must ask ourselves *'What are our customer's goals?'*

Answering this question was relatively straightforward for the pre-Industrial Revolution craftsman. The customer was right there, demanding a table with four legs, made out of wood with a drawer for putting the place-mats in. It is still quite easy for many small businesses which are in close contact with their customers; it's even easier if people are buying something because of who *you* are, like a Damien Hirst artwork.

But what about those businesses which are so large that many employees never have any contact with customers? What about those companies which have more than one distinct type of customer? In my