

IDEAS IN ACTION

Pianos, Ice Cream and You

April 2007

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The big "E"

The Fine Print

You might not have put this together, but Steinway (the legendary piano maker) and Cold Stone (the fast growing ice cream chain) have a lot more in common than many realize. Both have some unique approaches to satisfying customers and building their business brands. Both have built their reputations without advertising (one over the past 150 years, the during the past 5).

PIANOS, ICE CREAM AND YOU

When you buy a Steinway, one of the benefits is that the company arranges a concert by a pianist in your home. You pick the date, give them the guest list, and they take care of the rest. You enjoy a neat experience and get to impress your guests. And you know who ends up becoming a future Steinway customer? The guests! Now, that's clever marketing!

When you go to Cold Stone, an ice cream cone easily runs five bucks or more. Flavor sampling is encouraged, and you get to customize your order with goodies that get mixed in before your eyes on a cold slab of granite. The teenage scoopers sing for tips. It's a brief performance dubbed "eatertainment" that has people standing in long lines on hot nights. Again, very clever marketing.

What these two examples have in common is something we should all pay attention to, namely the customer experience. Whether we're dealing in high-end pianos or passion fruit sorbet, the path to differentiating our offering and commanding premium prices is through the delivery of over-the-top experiences to our customers.

THE BIG "E"

Welcome to debut of Ideas in Action, a newsletter designed to stimulate your thinking and help you continuously improve the experience you offer your customers. The inspiration for doing this comes from 20 years of marketing and sales experience with medical technology, specifically ones that are so good that customers (meaning the doctor's patients) are willing to pay for them with their own money rather than wait for somebody else (meaning insurance) to pick up the tab.

My firm, SM₂ Consulting, works with leading manufacturers and providers in ophthalmic, dental, and cosmetic/aesthetic specialties. During the past 5 years, we have published numerous articles and

reports (available in the Library of our just-launched website), most of which apply across the board to the effort involved in the business and marketing of elective procedures. What I've learned while doing the research and writing is that when it comes to the marketing of services, the ultimate form of marketing occurs when the service you deliver exceeds the expectations in such a way that your customer feels compelled to tell everyone they know about it and continue doing so for a long time. We have passed by the era in marketing when you could create the right "mix" of traditional concepts - positioning, promotion, pricing, packaging, and all the other "P"s - in order to be successful. Those "P"s are still around, but they are taking a back seat to the big "E" of marketing called experience.

My goal is to discover and highlight for you great role models of products, services and companies that know how to deliver an enhanced customer experience.

We've got some good things planned going forward, so stay tuned. I'll be discussing pricing (you won't believe how much a buttocks lift actually costs!), a whole new approach to the sales of cell phones, and an interview with The Experience Economy author Jim Gilmore. In the meantime, I have finally published the long-awaited Top Ten Marketing Mistakes made by refractive surgeons, which is now available for you to download at the SM2 website. It should be a good conversation starter at your next staff meeting. For those of you who got this "magically", I was the magician who added you from my rolodex. I hope you will let your friends and colleagues know about the newsletter and the site.

Summer starts today. That means swimming, BBQ, and, of course, Cold Stone. Enjoy!

THE FINE PRINT

I call this a "newsletter" but it's really more of a "fire starter," intended to spark thoughts and ideas for readers to more creatively solve their own marketing challenges. It is intended to be more raw and "straight from the gut" (thank you Jack Welch) than what happens in my monthly column in CRSToday. I'll do my best to issue this newsletter when I have something to say which I think adds value to your efforts to improve the level of customer experience in your practice or business.

We won't sell or rent your e-mail address or name. If you are bored and don't want to receive this, you check out at anytime. I hope the opposite happens and that this is good enough stuff that you will forward to your friends and colleagues so they can join in. Feedback is good! If you want to comment on something here, send a note to me at the address below.

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