

# PUGET SOUND Business Journal

*Business Leaders Get It.*

JULY 30, 2007

## Don't always think about you; think about customers

I lose patience with marketers who fall in love with their brand and can't let go — even if letting go a little might mean selling something.

If by brand you mean what your company or product is known for, I don't have a problem. If you mean the 200-page document your marketing department has made up so that everyone in your company "speaks with one voice," I think you're in trouble.

Don't spend so much time thinking about yourself -- think about your customer for a while.

You don't always control what people think about you. In those terms, you can't really control your brand. The best you can hope for is that people buy what you're selling and they like what they get for their money.

I say if your brand is getting in the way of selling, better to sacrifice your brand guidelines document and make a sale.

### Brand authenticity

Some experts go the other way and say that you not only don't control what people think of you, but if you try to stray too far from what they already think about your brand, you'll be in even bigger trouble. They call it brand authenticity.

That's why, for example, they believe Wal-Mart failed in its attempt to go upscale. Nobody bought the 400 thread-count sheets because they didn't resonate with the Wal-Mart brand.

I don't have a lot of patience with these experts either.

Is it possible that Wal-Mart forgot to tell the people who buy high thread-count sheets and other high-end accessories that they could get them for less at Wal-Mart? I realize Wal-Mart has a bazillion shoppers and a good number of them are probably

### MARKETING WISE



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affluent. But they may be there for the detergent and never head over to the linens. If they'd been told, they might have thought it was really good news that they could pick up a bargain in Egyptian cotton while they were out getting the weekly supply of milk.

Most of us will never have the problems of a Wal-Mart. We won't be worrying about the authenticity of our brand the way Starbucks might fret about why their stores no longer have the same coffee aroma.

All this navel-gazing is pretty hard to take for a hardened marketer like me.

### The safe assumption

I'll say it again. It's not all about you. It's about your customer. The safe assumption is they don't care about you. They don't think about your brand. They don't even know you.

Authenticity is not your problem. The relevance of your product to your target market is your problem. You'll make that longed-for emotional connection to your brand when you solve the customer's problem.

If your product solves a problem, go out and find the people with that problem. Tell them what you have for them, why they need it, how happy they'll be that they found it, they can now lay aside every anxious thought because they have found what they need ... and what you're offering.

That's all people want. That your brand

is somehow more "authentic" than your competitor's brand is rarely an issue. The locally owned coffee shop may be more authentic than Starbucks, but if I need to be sure my espresso drink is just what I want right now, my desire for authenticity usually takes a back seat.

Of course, credibility is — in fact — a real issue. Can they believe you'll really solve the problem you claim? If they've bought your product before, they'll know for a fact what it can do. This is the best, most solid, most credible way to build your brand — by getting people to experience it.

### Customer point of view

Getting someone to take action, to buy your product isn't easy. And it's a lot harder if you only think about persuasion from your point of view and not the customer's.

For example, if a company shouts its message night after night on prime-time television, the marketing department and the advertising agency may believe they're investing in building the brand.

On the other hand, a targeted message in a more measurable medium will probably be more effective — and won't add to the messaging clutter in the same way. As consumers (and as television viewers), we should all be happy about that.

Don't get all caught up in thinking about your brand. Think about your customers and how you can solve their problems — and your brand will take care of itself.

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