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WOW Brands

Brand Performance In Every Customer Experience

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Follow the Rules

When dealing with customers, the rules of branding and customer experience are simple:

- A brand is a promise
- Customer experience is delivery of the brand promise
- Promises create expectations
- Always ensure that you can live up to your promises and meet your commitments
- Under promising and over delivering is the more effective method of creating close and committed relationships
- Unfulfilled expectations lead to disappointment
- Disappointment causes loss (of business, loyalty, brand equity, trust and future business)
- Never overpromise and under-deliver

Do you follow the rules or ignore them?

WOW Brands or NOW Brands

WOW brands represent those few, select organizations which truly live up to their brand promises and deliver exceptional customer experiences. These are the brands that actually create wow experiences rather than just advertise and promise them. To deliver those wow experiences, these brands plan for the long haul. They focus on creating sustainable and credible value for customers. These WOW brands spend the necessary time to ensure that they are able and willing to live up to their promises and meet customers' heightened expectations. They align their organizations (from R&D to Finance and Customer Service) to be successful in delivering high quality experiences, live up to their brand promises, and establish long-term, intimate relationships with their customers. The WOW brands recognize that the key to establishing these relationships is not the promise, but the actual delivery.

NOW brands on the other hand focus on short term gains. They rush to over promise without establishing the infrastructure to deliver on those promises. They are the brands which hope that a quick design fix, for example an updated font and color, will solve their rather inherent problem: they are simply not that great. The NOW brands expect

immediate rewards for very little investment. Their investments are often short term and the expectation is that the return will happen within the next 90 days (the typical horizon of today's senior management). These organizations use branding exercises as a quick fix in an attempt to avoid the investment in creating differentiated customer experiences that will command their asking price.

Why do most companies fail to live up to their brand promises and deliver wow experiences? Why do many brands end up as NOW brands with very limited return on investment? The most common reason is the failure to define and understand how to own, create and deliver wow experiences across all organizational touch points. Companies routinely fail to operationalize their brand promises – leading them to deliver experiences that do not fully meet the expectations created by their brand promise. Many marketers ignore the fulfillment aspect of their brand promise and marketing campaigns. They choose to make grandiose promises while leaving the often impossible task of living up to these promises to others. Consequently, these companies are forced to lower prices to compensate customers whose expectations have not been met because they were set by individuals concerned with issues such as brand recollection and conversion rates, not promise fulfillment.

Organizations that strive to create a WOW brand and deliver wow experiences need to do the following:

- Understand the brand and its impact on the customer
- Recognize their mission and role in living up to the brand promise
- Align and motivate their employees to execute the brand promise
- Empower their employees with the tools, information and authority to fulfill the brand promise.

Organizations which are NOW brands and are unwilling or unable to live up to their brand promises should never make these promises to begin with. No one, least of all customers, appreciate disappointment. Disappointment carries consequences, more often than not, painful financial consequences.

It is time to rethink your brand strategy in the context of your actual brand delivery through customer experiences. Are you willing and able to deliver the promised brand in the form of a wow customer experience?

The Conventional Branding Challenge

The unveiling of the new brand was held in a glitzy, famous theater. It was truly a production for all to behold. The new logo incorporated elements from its predecessor but was now replete with a modern font and a rejuvenated color scheme that reflected the hope for a new and bright future. The inspiring slogan that accompanied the logo was gleefully embraced by all.

Following a multi media, music-filled presentation by the CEO, all employees enjoyed appetizers color coded to match the logo's new color scheme, and received gift bags complete with the customary new t-shirt, sticker and mug all bearing the new logo and slogan. The event was a stunning success.

Now what?

The vast majority of employees perceive this new brand exercise as little more than cosmetics. They view the new brand as an experiment concocted in the marketing and brand laboratories. In their minds, the brand is owned not by the entire organization but by the heads of marketing communications and market research. The thinking is that since only these two individuals and their surrogates are responsible for producing new marketing materials, all other employees can return to work and continue business as usual.

The irony of this situation is that from a customer's viewpoint, the new brand and new messages represent a new reality (or a second chance). While they might have "seen and heard it all before," they will still align their expectations with the new brand promise. If employees aren't willing to change or raise their performance in order to meet customers' heightened expectations, the new brand will damage the corporate image by leading customers to believe that nothing has really changed and it really is still business as usual.

Experience demonstrates that the vast majority of brand development programs do little to change organizational behavior. However, companies launching new brands are more than willing to declare victory when their logos appear in full page ads in major publications such as the Wall Street Journal, New York Times and USA Today. They fail to recognize that there is more to revitalizing or changing a brand than launch parties and marketing campaigns.

How Do We Deliver What Was Promised?

Imagine a hotel chain launching a multi-million dollar advertising campaign touting a new five star hotel in San Francisco. The ad exudes prestige and exclusivity with a careful choice of wording, gold logo and striking images. The hotel promises customers unparalleled service, highlighting an extremely attentive staff, superior spa and other amenities that only a cherished few can afford. Now imagine arriving customers who find that this five star hotel is little more than a renovated youth hostel that might, on the best of days, be worthy of a three star rating. The “spa” is in reality a swimming pool with a couple of coin operated massage chairs on the side. The attentive staff barely speak English. The other “amenities” are nowhere to be found.

Does the brand promise live up to reality?

Absolutely not. Launching this type of a multi-million dollar advertising campaign to promote an inferior experience would rarely, if ever happen. Such an act would be deemed wasteful and downright stupid, for it would lead to a flood of customer complaints, probably some lawsuits, as well as demands for full refunds.

What’s the big deal? Why does it matter?

A brand represents a promise and expectation made by an organization to its customers. It reflects an organization’s competitive identity and should communicate to customers the reasons that they should frequent the establishment, pay premium prices and evangelize to their friends and family. WOW brands recognize that a brand represents a value proposition promise, and that their customer experience (regardless of where it is delivered) represents the fulfillment of that promise. The customer experience is defined as the total value proposition delivered to customers across all touch points. This value includes experience attributes such as on time, delivery and the quality of products as well as the experience attitudes such as the emotional engagement created during interaction with the customers.

In WOW brand organizations, all employees are responsible for fulfilling the brand promise, irrespective of the department they work in – product design, process improvement, marketing or customer service. The quality of employee performance across all organizational touch points is the ultimate reflection of brand quality.

The Brand Performance Platform

Just as it is critical that the logo and messaging be consistent across all organizational touch points, it is even more critical that the brand performance, a.k.a. the quality of the customer experience, be equally consistent across the organization. When organizational functions are not aligned around the fulfillment of the brand promise, value becomes commoditized, and customers are left confused, angry and likely to take their business elsewhere.

What WOW brands successfully developed, and is missing in NOW brands, is a Brand Performance Platform. A Brand Performance Platform aligns the organization and enables employees to deliver branded customer experiences.

The Brand Performance Platform is a process of alignment that:

- Ensures that the whole organization understands the performance required to fulfill the brand
- Provides every touch point with the tools and authority to deliver the required brand performance
- Measures every department against the delivery of the brand performance
- Aligns employee understanding of their role in the brand performance through customer experience delivery
- Removes all obstacles to living by the brand promise and values to free employees to perform

In the absence of a Brand Performance Platform, the brand will remain an unfulfilled or poorly fulfilled promise. This will be a source of frustration and distrust among customers. It will ultimately achieve the opposite result – customer disloyalty.

Imagine the difference between two troupes of actors planning to perform Romeo and Juliet. One troupe is performing on the stage of the world renowned Lincoln Center. The second troupe is working few blocks away, on the streets of New York City. The first troupe has the best costumes and sets at their disposal as well as top of the line lighting. The second troupe's costumes are used clothing and they perform to the background of honking taxis. The first troupe represents a WOW brand. They acquired the Brand Performance Platform that allows them to deliver a masterpiece performance. They deliver wow. The second troupe represents a NOW brand. Although they utter the same words of Romeo and Juliet as their counterparts at Lincoln Center, they

do so in a poorly designed setting that damages the overall experience. As a customer, the first performance commands a premium price; the second will barely get you to throw \$1 into the wrinkled hat placed in front of the actors.

When developing a new brand, the issue of the Brand Performance Platform must arise early on in the process as well as and during the process itself and not after the brand has been defined. Professionals must address the following core questions:

- Can the organization deliver on the brand promise?
- Can the organization's employees align their performance around the brand promise?
- Can we translate the brand promise into operational guidance?
- Can we realistically apply the brand promise to every organizational touch point?
- What changes must take place to deliver the brand performance through customer experiences?
- Can Suzy in the accounting group and Joe in the legal department deliver the brand promise?
- How do we change our measurements to ensure that we track brand performance and not brand perceptions?

In launching a new brand, and therefore a new promise, WOW brands ensure that the Brand Performance Platform is in place to enable the actualization of the promise through customer experience delivery.

To reiterate: the old cliché of under-promising and over-delivering is critically important in the context of brand management. An organization should not make promises that it either cannot or will not keep. As in our hotel/hostel example, if a brand is not fully aligned with reality (or an organization's ability to fulfill the promise), customers will not only be disappointed but will punish the offending companies with their wallets.

Branding professionals are the ones who need to assume the responsibility for the development of a Brand Performance Platform and ensure the organization's ability to deliver. Branding can no longer confine their scope of responsibility to color schemes and logo design.

Every brand development process aspires to wow, but very few organizations set the stage and develop the Brand Performance Platform to actually deliver it. This is the distinguishing factor between NOW and WOW brand organizations.

Rethinking Branding in the Context of Execution

To deliver WOW brands, we need to rethink the whole delivery process, which we called the Brand Performance Platform. The vast majority of branding efforts share a specific DNA: visual design. They seek visual expressions that will brilliantly and simply represent a message. This laser focused skill blinds them to the broader question: "Is the visual representation a true representation of the capability to deliver?" Just because it is brilliant does not make it real.

It is time to rethink branding in the context of ORGANIZATIONAL execution and the ability of the organization to deliver on whatever promise is being made. Through our experience of assisting clients to become more customer-centric, we have witnessed how this core competency of branding professionals causes repeated mistakes that lead to missing the branding effort targets.

In the following pages we will describe some of those common mistakes and propose ways to establish a Brand Performance Platform. It is only in the context of execution through a Brand Performance Platform that the brand can be truly authentic and relevant to customers. Some might claim that these responsibilities are outside the scope of the branding profession. This might be the case in the traditional definition of branding. It should not be the case when examining the larger issue of brand promise without the brand performance to fulfill it.

An emerging role, Chief Customer Officer, attempts to address the ownership challenge. The role is geared to take a holistic view of all the touch points in which we interact with a customer and ensure a consistent quality of experience. In some organizations we have seen this role being merely an advisory function while at others the CCO is an operational role. No matter what the title is, the issue of ownership must be addressed and a role must be created to own the complete customer journey. This role, be it Chief Customer Officer, Chief Marketing Officer or Vice President of Customer Experience, must own the complete value chain from brand promise to customer experience fulfillment. The ownership of the Brand Performance Platform belongs to this role.

WOW brand organizations challenge their branding people to turn the process upside down and begin the journey by guaranteeing organizational delivery capabilities and alignment through a Brand Performance Platform first. Even if they aspire to create a brand new

experience for customers, their design will start with capabilities in mind and will not remain in the domain of the aspiration. Once that has been done, the graphic representation and glitz is tackled as a form of communication of the promised customer experience. WOW brands ensure they have wow customer experiences and then look for the brand design efforts to express this unique differentiation.

Is It Really That Great?

Make It Truly Different – Brand development must also be considered in the context of an organization’s value to its customers. A differentiated brand is directly linked to a competitively differentiated, and therefore profitable, customer experience.

For the brand performance to be authentic it needs to be differentiated. Where companies often fail in their brand development efforts is with the commoditized nature of their value proposition. Differentiation is the key element to brand strength. Companies routinely select a description that is vague and easy to defend when claiming differentiated value propositions. An example of this language is “innovation”. Organizations are increasingly using language or slogans that few can challenge. After all who doesn’t like “innovation”? However, the downside to using such language is its generic nature. Customers cannot relate to “innovation” any more than an employee in the Legal or Finance department can.

At Disney the brand differentiation is Magic. The company does not settle for less. It is not about convenience or customers feeling good. It is magic. The moment they settled on this high bar, they designed the brand performance platform accordingly to ensure that their employees deliver it. Many entertainment companies seek to entertain their customers and create fun experiences. Only Disney delivers Magical experiences.

To reconsider your brand in the context of wow, review the Customer Experience Principles. They will provide you with guidance. The more principles you follow the more your brand will be WOW vs. NOW. These principles will allow you to identify new opportunities to differentiate and create a uniquely delivered customer experience and therefore to WOW your customers.

For brand performance to reach the wow domain, employees need to represent a difference they believe in. They need to be inspired by the brand promise and relate to the emotions they will evoke in customers. To make a difference in an organization and bring the brand to life, employees need to feel that they are part of making a difference in customers’ lives. The foundation of the Brand Performance Platform is the inspirational difference that employees will be able to make through differentiated value to customers.

Principles of Customer Experience Design

PRINCIPLE	DEFINITION
Complete Solution	→ Solve the complete problem
Authentic	→ Be real and genuine
Personalized	→ Treat the customer as a unique individual
Relevant	→ Make it relevant to their their lives
Timely	→ Be fast
Customized	→ Alter the experience to suit their needs
Visualize Value	→ Ensure that they see the value you deliver
Simple Language	→ Speak using clear language
Value Pre-Sale	→ Add value before you sell
Value Post Sales	→ Add value after you sell
Shared	→ Allow customers to share with others
Expressive	→ Provide the customer with the ability for self expression
Lasting	→ Make it last longer
Profitable	→ Ensure that it is profitable for you
Emotionally Engaging	→ Evoke and engage emotions

THE Questions

- Would you be wowed? Are you inspiring?
- What emotions do you evoke?
- Can the new brand and associated messages be used by a competitor?
- Can sales people win business without discounts as a result of this new value?
- Will employees find the new brand distinct and will it serve as a source of pride?

What Is Changing?

Define the Change – Any exercise in branding will inevitably straddle the fence between past and future. All organizations have brand values and traits that they will want to retain, and others that they want to drop as they look to the future. The Brand Performance Platform must clearly communicate what changes and what stays.

Recognizing this challenge and developing plans to bridge between the past and future is critical to the success of any branding initiative. Branding professionals often fail to recognize this challenge, and adopt a “my way or the highway” attitude that is negatively perceived by an organization’s employees. To avoid this resentment, it is incumbent on the brand owners and developers to define and communicate the scope of change to as broad a group of employees as possible. The Brand Performance Platform must recognize and appreciate the past achievements, even if it will not retain all of their principles moving forward. It is this respect that will build a bridge of goodwill among employees called upon to execute the new brand.

The issues to consider and communicate include the following:

- What is the required change?
- What elements of the current brand will remain?
- What is the reason behind the change?
- What are the objectives that you are trying to achieve?
- What future are you attempting to create?

Communicating the answers to the aforementioned questions will go a long way toward establishing “buy in” among the organization’s employees. Their buy in is critical as they will be the ones tasked with fulfilling the brand promise through the delivery of exceptional customer experiences.

WOW Brands experience a smoother transition to their aspired wow world. They respect the past and have clear answers about change and why it takes place. NOW brands, on the other hand, experience multiple challenges. Some fail to make their brand initiative stick and differentiate because the change transition is not properly planned and articulated to the people who carry the torch of branding in their customer experience delivery.

THE Questions

- What will the change deliver that we do not have today?
- Is this change a promise or a threat to customers?
- Is this change a promise or a threat to employees?

Why Change?

Clarify The Sense Of Urgency – “We met our numbers” is the common response to change. NOW brands do not initiate change except as a last resort. WOW brands initiate change because they refuse to sit still and get complacent.

Communicate the reasons behind the burning platform to change on a regular basis to a cross section of employees. Explain the necessity and timing for change. Openly discuss with employees market trends, financial pressures, customer requirements, competitive dynamics, and legislative issues that are driving the need for timely change. Keep employees updated on the status of the project. Involve them to help overcome challenges that arise along the way.

When brands are launched without conducting these types of discussions, they indicate that the brand remains the sole purview of marketing professionals, not the broader organization. Companies should only undertake branding initiatives if it will effectuate change in the organization, not because a so called marketing guru thinks that “it’s time.” Ultimately, it is an organization’s employees who will ensure the success of a branding initiative. If they do not share their organization’s urgency for change, brand initiatives will be doomed to failure.

THE Questions

- Do we have a financial business case to justify the change?
- Is the burning platform for change customer centric or self centric?
- What is the expected Return on Investment?

Can We Afford The Change?

Budget for Change – There are certain things in life that you cannot do half way. You cannot be pregnant 50% of the time. You cannot be 50% committed to an organizational cost reduction initiative. Similarly, you cannot launch and sustain a change oriented branding campaign without 100% commitment.

Many organizations confuse brand launch with brand sustainability. They do not budget for the wider scope of change required beyond the logo change on all signage and corporate stationary. This confusion and an inadequate change budget causes resentment in the employee ranks. If resources are reallocated to the branding group but are not distributed in a manner which executes the requisite change to accompany the new brand, employees will be unable to live up to the brand promise.

During an engagement with a client, we came across a new brand launch where the company plastered the new brand messages all over New York City. By the time they were done with this exercise, which was only 24 hours of exposure, there was no budget left to educate the employees and explain the implication to their daily work. The Brand Performance Platform needs to include proper budgeting to bring the message to every employee and apply it to the daily customer experience of every employee.

WOW brands budget for the entire journey while NOW brand budget for a launch. At the Ritz Carlton hotels, the equivalent of 10 percent of the payroll budget is dedicated to employee training. This commitment ensures that the WOW brand is consistently reinforced throughout the year. Singapore Airlines, another major WOW brand, spends double the industry benchmark on training and retraining their people. This budgetary commitment allows the airline to enjoy a disproportionately positive reputation and garners huge loyalty despite the very small passenger base in Singapore.

Organizations need to budget for change and create an environment in which change can and will happen. To execute the brand promise, processes and procedures need to be examined carefully and adapted, if necessary. Information systems may be required to support the new promise. Change will inevitably take on various forms. This can include everything from redesigning forms to customer service education. All are necessary to ensure successful execution of the brand promise. All changes need to be budgeted for, otherwise we are back to brand

promise without brand performance. This sends a strong signal to customers and employees regarding your true commitment (or lack thereof) to the brand.

THE Questions

- What is the larger scope of change required to adapt to the new brand guidelines?
- How much should such change cost?
- What is the scope of investment required in every touch point?
- What timeframe does your brand implementation budget cover?
- Who will pay once you are past the launch date?

Lead By Actions

Leadership As A Role Model – An organization’s leadership is expected to serve as a role model for its employees. If the CEO and senior organizational members are unwilling to act in a manner that reflects brand values and promises, employee behavior will remain unchanged. Some senior leaders erroneously believe that announcing the new brand or approving a new advertising campaign is proof that they take the brand initiative seriously. They are wrong.

The Brand Performance Platform needs to include a detailed plan for what the leadership role model is all about and how it should manifest itself in every day behavior.

Serious commitment to the brand entails making substantive changes to personal schedules and by allocating more time to brand initiatives. If calendars remain unchanged after the launch, executive support will be lacking. Unlike a CRM implementation, brand initiatives require the active involvement of senior leaders because the brand is an expression of the organization’s value proposition and represents a promise to customers. Senior leaders demonstrate the importance the organization attaches to the value proposition.

Senior leadership commitment often boils down to small actions. At Nordstrom, a recognized WOW brand, the CEO answers all his calls. He will also not shy away from picking up a piece of trash and placing it in the nearest trash bin. He will not ask an employee to do it. He will do it himself. The leadership role starts with small actions that demonstrate that what matters is not keeping the organizational hierarchy, but making sure customers receive the best experience.

At Virgin Atlantic Airways, when a sales person achieves 1 million pounds worth of sales, the CEO arrives in his office, goes down on his knees and says “thank you.” This is another great example of how senior leadership takes brand performance seriously and inserts themselves into the daily reinforcement of the commitment to WOW brand delivery.

At companies with WOW brands, it is common to associate the CEO with the authentic representation of the brand. At NOW brands, you hardly relate any values or uniqueness to the senior leadership.

An organization’s executives need to be front and center and rally the entire organization behind the new brand promise so that it can live up to, and possibly even exceed, customer expectations. They need to

understand the manner in which they are expected to visibly change their own behavior. They are the ones who must communicate brand messages internally as well as to external parties such as shareholders, analysts and the press.

THE Questions _____

- Do senior executives know how to change their behavior appropriately?
- Do we have a personal commitment from each executive to act in alignment with the new brand?
- How do we ensure that all employees see the change in action by senior leadership?

The Translation

Translate the Brand to Action – Ultimately the brand promise, if fulfilled is a series of small actions conducted by employees every day. They are the customer experience delivered by the brand ambassadors, the employees. Organizations need to communicate to employees at all levels and in all functions, the types of actions that they need to undertake to fulfill the new brand promise. The Brand Performance Platform needs to be specific so it will become actionable. Specific does not, however, mean restrictive. The goal is not to turn employees into robots.

WOW brands create scenario based inspirational guidelines. They demonstrate to employees how the brand promise can become a delightful customer experience within the context of performance scenarios they encounter regularly in their specific area of work. These scenarios enable employees to learn how to deliver the right experiences without having rule books and processes to hold them back.

During a recent review of a financial institution's brand, we identified three brand values. These values were "respect for customers", "fairness in every interaction" and "responsiveness to customer requests". I asked the brand managers whether they believed that their brand values were unique or whether their competitors were also trying to show respect, be fair and responsive. Only then did our client realize that the brand values it espoused could be adopted by any of its competitors. So many companies in this industry adopt (explicitly or implicitly) similar values. Success ultimately lies with the fulfillment of brand values by translating it into small actions, not in the general promise. These detailed actions should be this company's competitive differentiator.

The key differentiator for this company would be their employees utilizing a Brand Performance Platform to turn these promises into an every day customer experience delivery. Employees will do so when they learn how to apply it to their own work.

THE Questions

- Did we develop detailed guidelines for execution?
- What is the service philosophy that supports the brand promise delivery?
- How do we make sure that the brand shines through in every employee's performance?

Everyone—Really Everyone

Create Line of Sight for Every Touch Point – The brand must incorporate operational guidance for every organizational function. It is irrelevant whether the function is customer facing or is in the back office. Many back office employees in finance, legal, HR or IT believe that they are not in the business of serving customers. They fail to recognize that while some employees are experience creators, others like them, are experience enablers. Experience enablers help to ensure that experience creators provide customers with the desired experience. This makes their performance critical to the organization's success.

The Brand Performance Platform should unify the whole organization around delivering on the brand promise. It must be relevant to every employee at every function, irrespective of their actual face to face contact with customers.

In the HR function, employees are charged with recruiting and hiring those individuals who will be responsible for fulfilling the brand promise and delivering the right experience to customers. If HR personnel do not internalize the brand values and messages, they will not recruit and hire the appropriate people who will live up to the brand promise. If IT employees perceive their role solely in the context of networks and applications, they will fail to offer solutions that can create brand-oriented customer experiences.

To create a sense of everyone, TAM Brazilian Airlines initiated a unique practice. Every customer service employee works with customers for three hours at the airport prior to staffing the phones. This practice allows customer service employees to see customers and interact with them Very personally. They can now think of them and treat them like people and not like numbers.

Every employee must have a direct line of sight to what the brand means to them and their performance in order to understand how his or her actions contribute to the creation or enablement of the customer experience.

THE Questions _____

- Does every employee understand their role in delivering the brand promise?
- Do all functions understand their contribution to the brand delivery?

You Are What You Measure

Unify the Measurements – Organizations are often unified in name and logo only. WOW brands are unified in measurements as well. They hold every employee in the organization accountable to the same customer-centric measurements. NOW brands on the other hand have different functions operating according to their own sets of objectives and measurements. The prevalence of siloed environments ultimately leads to unfulfilled brand promises. Customers seek fulfillment of brand promises across all organizational touch points, not disparate attempts to deliver varying degrees of value.

The Brand Performance Platform must include a strong unifying measurement component. It needs to unify disconnected organizational functions with a common set of objectives and measurements. Only with common objectives will organizational functions collaborate on a regular basis. During a recent consulting engagement we encountered marketing department resistance over a suggestion to alter an advertising campaign that was offending customers. The resistance stemmed from the department's consistency in meeting its primary objective, "brand recollection". Since consumers were remembering the brand, they were successful. It made no difference that their memories were largely negative, even though this negatively impacted consumer spending.

WOW brands measure themselves against their unique value and not against generic measurements. They identify the questions that most closely correlate to what customer expect from them and correlate these expectations closely to future purchases and greater loyalty. At Ritz Carlton, the question of recommendations was considered, but ultimately it was not the defining questions. The defining question at the Ritz Carlton correlated closely to their promised value "providing a sense of well being". The hotel chain found that this question and strong scores when customers responded to this question, created the highest likelihood of repeat business and customer loyalty.

The consistent delivery of customer experiences that reflect the brand promise is predicated on the unification or alignment of departmental and corporate objectives. If all departments or functions are unified around a set of common brand oriented objectives, they will ultimately deliver the desired experience. In the absence of unifying measures, a new brand will be perceived as a suggestion, not as a corporate imperative. Most employees will simply ignore it.

The height of the bar you are trying to cross is another important element in brand performance measurements. WOW brands set a very high bar to cross. NOW brands settle for less. WOW brands know that only the extremely satisfied customers will actually spend more. They therefore do not declare victory until their aspirational goals were achieved. The bar you set will be the beacon of performance guidance to the rest of the organization. Set your measurements bar accordingly.

THE Questions

- Does performance evaluation reflect delivery of the customer experience?
- Do we measure customer actions or internal metrics?
- Do we measure siloed performance or company-wide performance?
- Are our metrics measurable across all organizational touch points?
- Do we set our own bar high enough to exceed customer expectations?

One Direction or No Direction

Organizational Alignment – Simply because an organization proclaims that it will become customer centric on a given date, doesn't ensure that this will actually happen. More often than not, organizations are unable to make the necessary and timely changes due to an absence of "organizational alignment." This phrase incorporates many elements ranging from hiring criteria and incentive programs to promotion criteria and education programs.

The Brand Performance Platform should detail all the required elements to create organization wide alignment. Most branding initiatives will start at existing companies with existing procedures. In such an environment, the Brand Performance Platform needs to recognize the lack of alignment and come up with recommendations to address this.

The failure to adequately address organizational alignment elements, such as developing brand oriented education programs and hiring criteria, can ultimately lead to brand failure. WOW brands recognize the importance of organizational alignment. They hire based on passion and not skills. They seek people who are passionate about their unique value to customers. NOW brands hire people based on skills and neglect to align the person to the desired customer experience delivery. The same logic follows with organizational education programs, performance evaluations and incentives and recognition. WOW brands consistently support unified performance that fulfills the brand promise.

THE Questions

- Are all employees hired on the basis of their ability to deliver the brand promise and create great customer experiences?
- Are we paying employees based on brand delivery?
- Does our education program support the consistent delivery of the right customer experiences?

Innovate, Err, Succeed

Experiment with Innovation – Despite the prevalence of lofty slogans regarding transformation, organizations (particularly large ones) are slow to innovate and change. The reality is that the track record for innovation is often not so rosy.

Employees are often reluctant to change, for several reasons.

LACK OF EXPERIENCE – they have never changed in the past or have been unsuccessful in previous attempts

FEAR OF PUNISHMENT – they believe that if they try something new and fail, they will be penalized

LACK OF TIME AND RESOURCES – there is not enough time and resources with current workloads to dedicate the necessary resources to implementing change across the organization

THE BURDEN OF THE PAST – when companies spend a small fortune glorifying their past, they send a message emphasizing “continuity” rather than “change”

No statement is more antithetical to the concept of change than “this is not how we do things here.” To overcome this and related challenges, organizations need to experiment with change in small steps.

WOW brands allow their employees to experiment without penalty. They might even reward attempts that did not materialize but which reflect the right initiative. NOW brands reward only successful innovation, often penalizing those who did not succeed, but whose attempts may have been on the right track.

At WOW brands, the role of innovation is not delegated to a specific department. WOW brands recognize that innovation can and should take place everywhere, whether it is in business models, processes or products. As such, every employee is asked to participate in the process of innovate, err, succeed. Mistakes are accepted at WOW brand organizations. They recognize it as part of the game. They recognize that sometimes you strike out and sometimes you hit a home run.

Transformation does not happen overnight, especially in large, history-rich organizations. Employees will need the leeway to change incrementally, make mistakes and not get penalized. Every organization is different, and the scope and speed of change should be adapted

on the basis of culture, size, personnel and history. Change agents should establish formal programs that encourage innovation and change, augmented by the requisite resources and incentives. Before organizations can run, they need to learn to walk – each adapting to change at their own pace.

THE Questions

- Does your corporate environment foster innovation?
- Where does innovation reside in your organization?
- What is your tolerance to failure in innovation?
- What is your track record of handling mistakes?
- Do you reward risk taking?

Are Employees Allowed To Perform?

Provide Permission to Perform – As odd as it may sound, employees often fail to embrace a new brand, even when they agree with its messages, because they feel that they lack the authority to do so. While the reasons behind this feeling or perception may vary, identifying and addressing them is critical. Whether the reason is dismissal of the new brand by middle management cynics or employee skepticism due to negative past experiences, the reason must be identified and addressed quickly and resolutely.

Ultimately the organization’s success in bringing the brand to life lies in its ability to address obstacles that may be holding employees back from embracing the brand. The Brand Performance Platform should address the element of authority to perform and the consequences of employee mistakes. The goal should be zero or close to zero escalations. The person who receives the problem has the power to solve it. This has been a long term commitment at Ritz Carlton Hotels. The hotel company provides employees with the budget and authority to resolve customer problems on the spot and not to drag them through paperwork and escalations to managers.

At Starbucks, every employee can provide a free cup of coffee to a customer who dropped his freshly brewed cup of coffee. One would argue that this is not Starbucks’s fault. It isn’t. But on a human level, the employee can help a fellow person without penalty and with the knowledge that he or she is empowered to do the right thing.

Most NOW brands have a legacy of limited performance authority. The WOW brands on the other hand subscribe to the model of “if you hire them trust them to do their job.” They provide their employees with the ability to respond to the challenges and therefore with the responsibility.

THE Questions

- Can your employees fully respond to the challenges presented to them?
- Do employees have the authority to perform?
- How do you address internal resistance and cynicism?
- How do you build a culture that nurtures above and beyond experience delivery?
- How do you make it authentic to all employees involved?

Dealing With Denial

When a new brand is launched, there is usually excitement and commitment. Executives love the new fresh look and see the promise. There is very little rejection and argument. This response is typical at NOW brands. The executives do not fully recognize the scope of the change from a performance standpoint. This lack of understanding becomes another major challenge to achieving a high level of performance. The absence of a significant number of objections is indicative of the level of importance placed on the brand by an organization's employees and often the executives.

People are often willing to wholeheartedly embrace a new brand if they think it requires little from them. These "silent deniers" will not argue with or raise objections to the brand professionals because they perceive that the new brand will have little, if any, tangible impact on their roles in the organization.

While the absence of objections might seem to be a positive indicator, the preponderance of silent deniers actually dooms the new brand (promise) to failure. No one truly expects to behave differently. Only when the brand is framed in the context of actions required from employees, will questions, concerns and objections be raised. Brand developers should ensure that people object loudly and engage in substantive discussion concerning the organization's past and its future. They should also recognize the importance of clearly communicating to employees the part they plan in fulfilling the brand promise.

THE Questions

- How many objections and rejections did you need to deal with?
- Did executives and employees fully understand the change in the context of their performance?
- Who are the silent delayers?
- What is the agenda of the silent delayers?
- What is your plan to deal with the silent delayers?

One Quarter Is NOT Long Term

Develop a Long Term Action Plan – WOW brand is more than a launch date. It is a long term commitment. It is a reflection of a decision to change organizational behavior and performance. NOW brands on the other side, lack any substantive, long-term brand plan, beyond the launch party.

For an organization to live up to its brand promise, the Brand Performance Platform should include an operational 12-18 month brand execution plan. The brand execution plan should cover a broad range of elements, but most importantly, it should contain action oriented performance guidelines for employees so that they understand the manner in which they can, and are expected to, fulfill the brand promise. A brand plan should include the following elements:

- Linking the brand and customer experience to daily employee performance
- Identifying and addressing areas of resistance
- Recognizing and rewarding early adapters who enthusiastically support the new brand
- Facilitating opportunities to experiment with change
- Incorporating the brand and customer experience into performance evaluations
- Establishing measurements to support brand fulfillment efforts
- Communicating success stories from both the customer and employee perspectives
- Supporting middle management efforts to reinforce the brand within the organization
- Assessing internal acceptance and internalization of the brand and customer experience on a regular basis

A detailed long-term action plan incorporating the aforementioned elements will prove crucial to the success of the brand. In the absence of such a plan, the new brand will be dismissed as a branding or marketing ploy. This will lead to employee and customer disappointment, cynicism and lack of trust.

THE Questions

- How far does your customer experience program go?
- What are your plans beyond the launch?
- Who own the success of the brand delivery across all touch points?
- How will you recognize and reward early adopters?

WOW Brands — Are You Ready?

WOW brands are no longer optional – they are mandatory. Customers are increasingly seeking experiences that meet or exceed their expectations. Only by exceeding these expectations will organizations be able to differentiate themselves from their competitors, command customer trust and obtain their loyalty. What makes WOW brands so powerful is not only their ability to raise customer expectations (many brands do accomplish this), but rather their ability to meet or even exceed customer expectations on a consistent basis. In a world of sound bites and cost efficiency measures, companies that can deliver experiences that meet or exceed their brand generated expectations will stand out and be rewarded.

Through creative design, appealing pictures and catchy slogans, companies can easily make grand pronouncements. Brand and marketing professionals can fall into the traditional branding trap where they make promises with these pictures and slogans but fail to have full organizational commitment and the ability to fulfill these promises.

To change this branding paradigm, we must ensure that all employees know precisely what they are expected to do in order to execute the brand promise prior to the development and launch of the brand. The presence of senior corporate officers, the press and select customers at a launch party is not a successful recipe for creating wow experiences. Success can only be achieved by following a disciplined approach to ensure that the brand promise is incorporated into the customer experience at every organizational touch point. Only by ensuring that the organization is willing and able deliver a wow experience, can branding and marketing professionals embark on the road to developing and launching a truly successful WOW brand.

Brand Performance Platform Checklist

- Brand mission and values
- Financially driven business case
- Experience definition
- Definition of the desired customer
- Touch point mapping and responsibilities
- Translation of brand to action
- Employee education
- Employee hiring guidelines
- Employee incentives
- Employee measurements
- Compensation plan criteria
- Customer related technologies
- Employee related technologies
- Employee authority guidelines
- Problem resolution processes
- Delivery and dialogue tools and processes
- Customer experience leadership program
- Change management challenges and plan
- Employee communication plan
- Manager commitment and education plan
- Management role model
- Customer communication plan

— About Strativity Group —

Strativity Group, Inc. is a global research and consulting firm advising organizations on creating lasting, profitable relationships with their customers and employees through the transformation of their strategies and execution to revolve around the customer experience.

Strativity Group, Inc. works with both Global 2000 companies as well as emerging businesses around the world. Our clients include Nokia, Computer Associates, SAP, American Management Association, Seagate Technology, Honeywell, Siemens, Dimension Data, FedEx, CATIC, Circle K, University of Pennsylvania, The Fund, Capital One, Jacada, Wyeth, Sage, Herbalife, Akibia, National, Lockheed Martin and Crown Plaza Hotels & Resorts and Nordea.

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WOW Brands

Is Your Brand a WOW Brand or a NOW Brand?

When dealing with customers, the rules of branding and customer experience are simple, and companies who create and deliver WOW brands have figured it out. Learn how you too can deliver the WOW brand and wow experience to your customers.

Read the rules, tips and guide
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