BECOMING A TALKABLE BRAND
HOW CUSTOMER TOUCHPOINTS LEAD TO CUSTOMER TALKING POINTS

Every successful brand aims to become talkable. The reasons are simple yet profound. Each week, the typical American consumer will mention 60 brand names with people online using social media and office in conversation. Additionally, recent research featured in a McKinsey Quarterly article indicates word of mouth is responsible for up to 50 percent of all purchase decisions made by customers. Talkable brands pandemic, and Christine Cox, Brand PR Director for Unilever, says they became so seamlessly woven into the fabric of conversations that they bridged brand-related information, sales, and a value of social currency.

In other words, Christine is saying this: if you’re not talking about a product, you’re forgotten about. And being forgotten about is a recipe for business failure. Let’s be clear: I’m not talking about getting some buzz for your brand. Not at all. I believe the word “buzz” needs to be eliminated from a marketer’s vocabulary. Buzz is an irritation, not a marketing tool. It’s a one-time event. It’s over. Buzz is one-time, and it’s dead. Big brands are living, not dying. They’re not dead. They’re not gone. They’re Dead.

And for too many marketers, they are living for the Buzz and not the Buzz. The Buzz, being a “One Day Big Bang” approach to getting people talking. The Buzz, being an “All Day Every Day” way to becoming a talkable brand. The average life expectancy of a Fortune 500 business is about 40 years. The average life span of a small business is a little more than eight years. Clear? A business is not in business for just one day. It is in business for a matter of days — a line. It’s a marketer’s responsibility to give consumers reasons to talk about brands, products, and services not just for one day, but rather, for a series of days. Starbucks does this. So does Apple. And Zappos does this. Zappos is building a business on being talkable everyday. For these businesses, being talkable is more about marketing and less about marketing through great buying experiences and receiving exceptional customer service.

Starbucks and Apple both deliver great buying experiences. Immediately upon entering a Starbucks, your senses come alive. You smell the coffee. You hear the music. You feel the warmth of the interior decor. Your senses are further heightened as you order your grande, nonfat, no foam, extra hot vanilla latte using the Starbucks mobile app. The final touch to the Starbucks buying experience occurs when you like the first sip of your drink. It’s equal parts delicious and enjoyment. The entire buying experience at every Starbucks location is talkable.

The retail buying experience at an Apple store is similar. No other retail store looks like or feels like an Apple store. Your senses are on perpetual overload as you hear, see, touch, and practically taste the delicious design of Apple’s iPhones, iPads, and iMacs talking. Not only is delivering great buying experiences talkable, it’s also profitable. According to a recent Harris Interactive survey, 27 percent of consumers who pay 15 percent more for an excellent customer buying experience. (Note: that for ROI)

Zappos, an online shoe and apparel retailer, is the current darling of the retail world. And for good reason: they have a loyal and evangelical customer base. It’s estimated 75 percent of Zappos total sales come from returning customers, and these repeat customers buy twice as much as new customers buy.

Zappos understands the hidden engine driving their success is delivering WOW customer service. To foster the spirit of WOW, a customer Zappos decided early on to diversify its marketing budget to seemingly mundane customer service touchpoints. A slow loading website aggravates customers. That’s why Zappos expends time and money to ensure its website leads faster than its retail competitors. Zappos promises to deliver orders to customers in two to five business days. However, the company, at its expense, over-delivers on its promise by shipping most orders for next day delivery. Customers are encouraged to buy multiple shoes, purses, and other apparel to see which fits best and ship back whatever doesn’t fit at no cost for 365 days.

Tony Hsieh, Zappos CEO, makes the business case for being talkable by explaining, “Over the years, the number one driver of our growth at Zappos has been repeat customers and word of mouth. Our philosophy has been to take most of the money we would have spent on paid advertising and invest it into customer service and the customer experience instead, letting our customers do the marketing for us through word of mouth.”

Starbucks, Apple, Zappos, and every other business does not need what customers talk about. Customers make these decisions. Because these decisions are up to customers, it’s crucial for businesses to give customers reasons to talk at every customer touchpoint.

If a business gives customers reasons to talk not just one day but every day, then it’s well on its way to becoming an endearing and enduring talkable brand. And the bottom line is listening to what customers are saying and responding accordingly — by tailoring the buying experience to their needs and wants, supporting them with superior customer service and giving them reasons to come back. That’s the recipe for creating a truly talkable brand.

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