

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

BRAND INSISTENCE: HOW TO CULTIVATE IT

Last month I introduced Nido Qubein, whose upscale Great Harvest Bread Company claims they have no competition. “People drive up to 30 miles from where they live to buy our bread,” he says, “because they love their families and want only the best for them.”

If a bread company can do that, certainly you can too. Nido calls it “brand insistence”. So how do you create that kind of “insistence” for *your* “brand”?

First, *you must have a great product*. In my 25 years as a Radio advertising account rep, I’ve worked with hundreds of small businesses, both good and bad, and what I’ve learned is that even with a great ad campaign, you can only fool people once. If brand insistence is your goal, make sure what you have is genuinely outstanding.

Second, *you must know why people buy what you sell*. You may think this is obvious, but think harder. People rarely buy your product; what they are really buying is the *product* of your product. When someone buys a shovel, what that person really wants is a hole in the ground (or something similar). Rarely does a person buy a shovel to decorate their garage wall. Why do people really buy what you sell? Find their buying motives, and you’re much closer to brand insistence. (By the way, if you’re reading this thinking, “I already know this,” you’re already in trouble. Don’t skip this part. You really don’t know unless you ask.)

Third, *you must know what the average customer expects* when they buy your product or service (Level 1), *and what it will take to blow them away* (Level 2). If you only deliver what the customer expects, or a Level 1 Experience, you leave yourself vulnerable to competition that’s satisfying them at the same level as you. What would it take to elevate to a Level 2? There are several ways to discover this; in-house surveys, good conversations with current customers, industry and trade resources, and studying other industries’ best practices are just a few.

Fourth, *you must take the Level 2 list and do as many of them as possible*.

What are some Level 2 ideas? Assuming your product is outstanding, you can:

- Have an “Invite A Friend and Save 25% Each” event (gets new customers and brings mutual benefit)
- Offer a “Frequent Purchase” Card, stamped or punched with each purchase, with the redemption of a current product or a new product
- For customers’ birthdays, send a card with a special free product or discount attached
- Create a special checkout counter or payment process that’s faster for more frequent shoppers
- Offer special treats in the lobby, like fresh-baked cookies, fresh coffee, or other similar items
- Add a small service or product to a customer’s list at no extra charge, “just because”
- Hire the most lovable, most well-liked individual in town as your “Wal-Mart Greeter”.

You don’t need everyone in a given market to be successful. All you need to do is build a few solid relationships with a few good customers that produce mutual benefit, and put all your energies and resources into maintaining and growing those relationships. If you’re successful at doing this, word-of-mouth will be the most powerful form of marketing you’ll ever have.

There are hundreds more Level 2 ideas out there. You just have to look, or get help from someone.

Don't be chicken. To your credit, as a businessperson, no one has the same contacts, the same degree of expertise, the same abilities to solve customers' business problems as you do. You are a unique blend of expertise, creativity, and energy. You have much more going for you than you think. Focus it and use it wisely.

But don't wait. In business, doing nothing can sometimes be the riskiest thing of all.

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