

CULTBRANDING

WORKBOOK

SEVEN STEPS TO GROWING
YOUR BUSINESS
BY BETTER UNDERSTANDING
YOUR CUSTOMER

BOLIVAR J. BUENO co-author of *The Power of Cult Branding*

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YOUR CUSTOMER**

BOLIVAR J. BUENO



**CREATIVE CRAYON PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK**

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ISBN-13: 978-0-9714815-4-1

Creative Crayon Publishers
230 Kings Mall Court, Suite 142
Kingston, New York 12401

Cover design by Melissa Thornton

Printed in the United States of America

“Know your audience; wear your guests' shoes, that is, don't forget the human factor; organize the flow of people and ideas; create a ‘wienie’ (that was Walt Disney's somewhat inelegant term for what you might call a visual magnet); communicate with visual literacy; avoid overload—create turn-ons; tell one story at a time; avoid contradictions—maintain identity; for every ounce of treatment provide a ton full of treat; keep it up.”

—Marty Sklar, past president of
Disney's Imagineering Division

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All great brands have a soul. Together, we're going to get to know your customers better and learn some very revealing things about you and your company. Have fun with this process and good luck!

Onward!

BJ Bueno
Orlando, FL

INTRODUCTION

The chief executive of a major enterprise storms into the café looking desperate and uncertain. Sales are down. Company morale is low. Margins are shrinking. His once-successful advertising tactic isn't working.

Fearing for his company and his personal financial future, he's desperate for an idea to turn things around. Sitting in a plush leather chair with a venti Frappuccino[®], the CEO leans back and closes his eyes. Relaxed and centered, the CEO ponders the concept of customer loyalty. He immediately engages the idea in conversation:

CEO: Let's cut to the chase. Is customer loyalty realistic?

Cult Branding: Of course. Why not? People develop loyalty to things they love, and profits prove this. Loyalty is a byproduct of a relationship with your customer.

CEO: Does it happen by accident?

Cult Branding: No. Just because your customers love you doesn't mean you're loving them back. Many companies have the attributes of a Cult Brand, but over time they ignore the whispers of their customers. Or if they do listen, they spend five years in focus groups and by the time they have their direction, the consumer has moved on.

Just because you want loyal customers does not mean they want to be loyal to you. Winning the heart of the customer doesn't happen accidentally. Somewhere, someone has to care enough to create a meaningful experience that leads to loyalty.

CEO: Can any product or service become a Cult Brand?

Cult Branding: Of course. Think about it: Harley-Davidson is just a bike—or is it? Harley-Davidson customers describe their relationship with the brand as if it were not just a motorcycle, but freedom. Harley isn't selling bikes, it's selling a freedom experience.

CEO: So how do you create a customer experience that develops loyalty?

Cult Branding: I'm glad you asked, because without everyone's alignment within the company, embracing the customer is nearly impossible. Typically, CEOs don't care about the relationship they have with their customers—they leave “caring about the customer” to marketing, and then depend on broadcasting and print ads to attract the customer. But to get back to your question: creating a customer experience that develops loyalty is not

easy. Everyone on your team—including you, the leader of your enterprise—must embrace customers and commit to developing new ways of serving and surprising them.

It is difficult to describe how to create a Cult Brand because that's not really what people want. As an organization, you want and need loyal customers to shop your stores, fly with you, buy your car, use your service, or purchase your mp3 player. You want them to tell all their friends how great you are, and how they should experience you for themselves. This kind of influence does not come easily—it comes only after they trust you, believe in you, and know you are part of them. In a strange way, they see a lot of themselves in you. This is not crazy talk; it's exemplified by the world of people falling in love with Jimmy Buffett and his concerts selling out the first day, or the world of consumers bringing a book to best-seller status overnight because Oprah endorses it. For these consumers, you are their only choice. This phenomenon is different from the simple savings card or membership advantages: here, people turn you into a tattoo and wear your symbol with pride.

People love companies that love them. It cannot be said more simply. When a company pursues its customer, it embraces a world of conversation and listening, rather than guessing and talking. It would be simple enough to run as many ads as you can afford, hoping the right words will transform you into a powerful brand. Cult Brands, however, are not fads. They survive not because they're "hot," but because they develop a long-term relationship with their customer and Brand Lover.

CEO: This sounds different.

Cult Branding: Welcome to the world of pleasing your customers—they are waiting for you.

CULT BRANDING DEFINED

What is a brand?

A brand is all the emotions and ideas associated with a product or service that create a distinct customer experience. It includes all things real or perceived, rational or emotional, physical or sensory, thought or felt, whether in form or function, planned or unplanned. You could say a brand is all the good advertising you run, all the bad advertising you regret, your best and worst customer service story—virtually everything that your enterprise does (the good and the ugly). Collectively, this conglomerate determines the customer experience and, therefore, the marketplace perception of your brand.

Successful brands are credible, meaningful, unique, holistic, sustainable, clear, and consistent. They add value to the customer experience across all touch points, and are trusted because they consistently deliver their promise.

Consider this: you open your fridge, take out a bottle of ketchup, squeeze it on your burger, and take a bite. It doesn't taste like the ketchup you love—it's watery and bland. You go back to the store, buy a new bottle, try it again, and it tastes great. You buy a third bottle, and the ketchup tastes watered-down again. Your experiences shake your trust: will the next bite be a good one or a bad one? Companies like Heinz take great pains to deliver the same amazing taste of their product—even from the small packet at McDonald's.

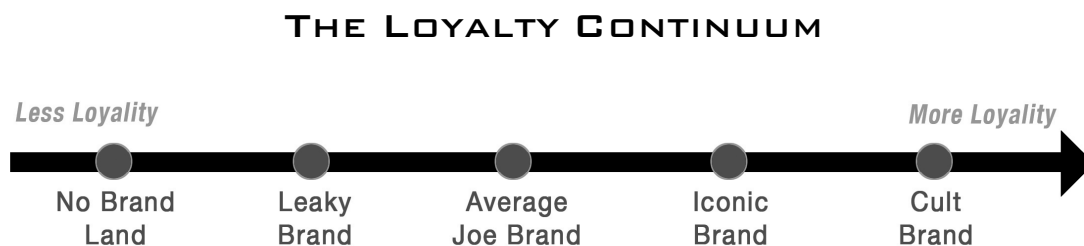
A brand is a *co-authored experience*—a mutual relationship lives between the customer and the brand. The company sets the intention of their brand, and the customer interprets his or her own meaning. The ultimate definition of your brand is determined and owned by your customers when they evaluate their experience with you.

What is a Cult Brand?

Most companies try to build brands that no one will hate instead of brands some people will love. Most marketers live in a world where they are constantly searching for the flashy, the splashy—in short, the trivial, often-meaningless brouhaha that has very little to do with the core of the brand.

Cult Brands understand that their brands belong to the customers. Only the customer's voice counts. A successful Cult Brand embraces its customers by anticipating their basic human and spiritual needs. As a consequence, Cult Brands achieve a level of customer loyalty unprecedented in traditional business.

To help illustrate, let's map various brands on *The Loyalty Continuum*:



No Brand Land: *No Brand Land* is wrought with challenges, and this is a place most small businesses find themselves. Companies in *No Brand Land* are often stuck working *in* their business rather than *on* their business, and they don't ever develop a solid idea of who they are, what they offer or stand for, or how they can improve their customer experience. These companies tend to change what they offer—and who they are—at the first sniff of a new or different (often perceived as “better”) opportunity, and they don't have any goals related to the customer relationship; their business is typically “all about them”—their service offering, the “extra buck” they can make, or the new challenge they want to conquer (without regard for how it affects their niche in the marketplace).

Leaky Brand: These companies have set up the basic identifiers: they have a name, a recognizable logo, a tagline, and perhaps a few other pieces of business collateral (brochures, etc.), but ultimately, they haven't discovered ways of being distinct, memorable, or necessary to their customers.

Average Joe Brand: Here we enter the world of large companies who have marketing departments that actively advertise and sell to their customers. They often take their brand messages in too many directions, which dilutes their brands because of inconsistency and confusion to their customers.

Iconic Brands: Iconic brands are all around us. We shop them and love them—they are part of our culture. They're easily recognized by their logo. These brands usually spend a lot of marketing money and are constantly monitoring their image and public perception. These iconic brands are *top of mind* brands and often dominate market share of a category: McDonalds, Microsoft, Dell, Coke, Pepsi, and American Airlines. Many national retail chains have loyal customers, but they don't occupy an irreplaceable position in the consumers' hearts.

Cult Brands: Cult Brands are in class of their own as they have mastered the art of building lasting and meaningful relationships with their customers. In the world of Cult Brands, the customer is not only king, but is part of the family. When you buy a Harley Davidson motorcycle, you are not just getting a bike—you're getting a membership into The Club. These brands have no competition. They rule their customer-defined category. There are no substitutes for Oprah, Vans, Linux, Southwest Airlines, IKEA, Harley-Davidson, Apple, Star Trek, Jimmy Buffett, and Volkswagen Beetle. These brands are profitable even in the most adverse market conditions because of the powerful relationships they've forged with their customers.

THE SEVEN GOLDEN RULES OF CULT BRANDING

As you proceed throughout this workbook, we'll remind you of the basic rules that all Cult Brands consciously or instinctively follow. It's critical that you keep these rules in mind as you navigate this intricate process for co-authoring your brand with your customer.

1 – The Golden Rule of Social Groups

Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.

We are a society addicted to communication: e-mail, cell phones, land-lines, fax machines, hand-held PDAs, interactive two-way pagers, twenty-four-hour cable news channels, and instant messengers. Why do we “need” all these different communication devices? We need them primarily to form and maintain our social groups. As human beings, we are all inherently social animals with a perpetual need to interact. We not only want to be part of like-minded groups, we enjoy being different and standing out.

2 – The Golden Rule of Courage

Cult-Brand inventors show daring and determination.

Cult Branders are like famous inventors and explorers: even in the face of doubters and critics, they dare to be different—and succeed. Cult Branders believe in themselves, and their products and services. They want to challenge conventional wisdom and obliterate it when given the chance. To really make your brand stand out in the marketplace and to attract a cadre of loyal followers, you must be willing to take significant risks. The people behind Cult Brands are fighters and leaders. They are not quitters or followers.

3 – The Golden Rule of Fun

Cult Brands sell lifestyles.

Cult Brands are just plain fun. Their products and services make their customers smile and feel better about themselves. Not only do Cult Brands give their followers an escape from life's responsibilities, they help them fulfill their passions and dreams. In other words, Cult Branders capitalize on our human need for self-actualization by developing products and services that support high-level needs. A company with a Cult Brand sells more than a product or a service: these companies develop and sell “the tools” that help their customers pursue their dreams and celebrate distinct new lifestyles.

4 – The Golden Rule of Human Needs

Listen to the choir and create Cult-Brand evangelists.

Cult Brands focus on serving the wants and needs of the customers they have. They don't get sucked into the trap of building products and services to attract new customers—they serve the congregation of customers their brands already have.

Respect your choir. Value their opinions. Reward them. Listen to them. Never ignore an enthusiastic follower of your brand. Remember that core followers all want to believe, but first they need to see miracles in the form of unexpected gifts and surprises. Do extraordinary things for your choir, and they'll become incredible brand evangelists.

5 – The Golden Rule of Contribution

Cult Brands always create customer communities.

Simply put, Cult Brands always give back. They are adamant about continually finding new ways to show love and appreciation for the passion and devotion of their customers. Unlike faceless corporations, Cult Brands are humble and personable. They never take their customers for granted. Cult Brands build strong, ongoing relationships with their customers by developing and supporting customer communities. Cult Brands aren't afraid to use today's profits to create customer communities for generating powerful long-term goodwill for their business and their brands.

6 – The Golden Rule of Openness

Cult Brands are inclusive.

Cult Brands are incredibly open and inclusive. They don't build imaginary profiles of ideal customers. They don't discriminate. They openly embrace anyone who is interested in their companies. In fact, exclusivity isn't even in the vocabulary of the Cult Brander. Instead, Cult Brands welcome with open arms customers of all ages, races, creeds, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Cult Brands prove to their customers that they are indeed open and inclusive by helping to fulfill the deep human needs that we all share, including belongingness and self-esteem. Cult brands become giant support groups for like-minded individuals.

7 – The Golden Rule of Freedom

Cult Brands promote personal freedom and draw power from their enemies.

The need for freedom is a product of self-actualization: we all cherish our freedom. Cult Brands promote underlying themes of freedom and nonconformity with memorable sensory experiences (like holding Apple's sleek, cool products and packaging; or watching the Oprah show) for their customers. Additionally, they stay fresh in the "diary of the mind" with brand consistency and nostalgia marketing.

Cult Brands draw strength and unify their brand lovers by identifying and targeting an archenemy—an opposing brand, person, or group—that conflicts with the Cult Brand's values or goals.

THE SEVEN STAGES OF CULT BRANDING

To help today's marketer apply the "Cult Branding" principles, we've outlined a linear, sequential process. In reality, these benchmarks are more like pillars than stages, each one important to building a stronger foundation for your brand.

The seven basic steps to better-understanding your customer and cultivating brand loyalty are:

- ❶ Determine Where You Are Now
- ❷ Discover Your Brand Lover
- ❸ Understand Your Brand Lover's Human Needs
- ❹ Address Your Key Touch Points
- ❺ Translate Your Ideas Into Creative Communication
- ❻ Sell-In to Your Internal Team
- ❼ Put Your Knowledge to Work

STAGE 1: DETERMINE WHERE YOU ARE NOW

Know thyself.

—Plato

Identifying and developing your brand begins behind the doors of your business. You must look within before you can save the world. Too often, businesses try to come up with a few good ideas and run a few “branding” commercials, and expect the consumer to fall helplessly in love at first sight.

Many factors affect how a company should go to market and what its branding strategy should be. Unless you know where you are today, determining the next step is challenging. Although I personally don’t believe in over-planning and creating too many blueprints in the world of hyper-change, I offer this section as a “snapshot” with the understanding that a photo once taken is no longer relevant. For example, when you take a photo of your children, your expectation isn’t that they’ll stay the same size forever. Similarly, your company is always growing; once it stops growing, it dies. I’m not saying this to scare you, but if your company is not innovating, you will not be relevant for long.

The following discovery questions are designed to help you clarify where you are as a company and to better understand the mechanics of your brand. Answer them individually and/or as a group with your leadership/marketing team. You don’t necessarily need to answer ALL of these questions; however, the more knowledge you have about your ship, the better suited you’ll be to navigate the open waters.

1) Where are you now? This question is as simple as it sounds. Where is your business today? Where do you perceive yourself to be within your industry and in your customer's eyes?

2) What are the current metrics you use to measure success within your enterprise? In the case of one of my clients, a traveling magic show, it's all about how many seats we fill in the theater. Yes, we capture smiles when the magic amazes the audience, but from a business perspective, we look at seats sold as a metric of our success.

3) What drives your economic engine? What is the source of your business's financial engine? In the case of the magic show, one may think it's the customer who purchases the tickets, but the real profits are in profits per city—how much profit is generated from a show in a particular city. What make this magic show “tick” is the profits per city that it visits.

4) What are your core channels for distribution or conducting business (for instance, where do you sell your products/services)? Is it in a store, on the Internet, in your office, over the phone? Every business has distribution channels to facilitate business transactions. By realizing the channels, you may uncover opportunities that might otherwise have been taken for granted.

5) Where are your primary competitors? What are they doing better than you? What can you learn from them? Many people are needlessly afraid of the competition. Your competition gives you the opportunity to learn! If you are paying attention, you can see where they under-serve and create new opportunities for your enterprise. Also, understanding where your competition is excelling shows you where you can improve. Good competition is healthy for your business and great for the customer. Embrace it.

6) What current trends, news, technologies, etc. are affecting your category? Many people focus on the future and forget to look at what is going on now. The *now* holds clues to the future of your business. Dig into your industry and list the trends that you can take advantage of today.

7) What is your “call to adventure”? The adventure is that “inner itch” about your business that has been floating around in your head for the last couple of days, months, or even years. Your “call to adventure” could be an opportunity to transform how products are sold in your industry or perhaps a new wireless delivery channel that’s yet to be invented.

8) What is your company's end vision? How will you know when you're done? Knowing where you're going includes having awareness of your ultimate goals. This question is very important—without this clarity, any ongoing decisions become haphazard guesses.

[illegible]

STAGE 2: DISCOVER YOUR BRAND LOVER

The sole purpose of business is to create a customer.

—Peter Drucker

Isn't Drucker's quote profound? He translates our "busyness"—developing product ideas, manufacturing, packaging, shelf stocking, messaging, forecasting, managing costs, dealing with suppliers, managing people, closing deals, working with technology—into one core purpose: to create a customer.

This giant symphony of details and systems serves to develop a relationship with another human being whose needs are filled because of all this hard work. Stated again: the only purpose of your business is to create a customer. Creating a customer gives your business a purpose. The center of your brand, then, must also be your customer.

The customer is the heart of your business. ALL of your branding efforts must be directed at creating a customer, and there must be a singular vision of the customer your brand serves. Great brands are not commodities—they don't fight for the same space as their competitor. Great brands compete in their own category—there is no substitute for them. They are unique.

Having a reliable profile of your customer simplifies your marketing and general business decision-making. Instead of fragmenting your offerings, you learn to "cut bait" on unsuitable ideas and focus on what best serves your customer. This single-minded pursuit of *serving your customer* clarifies and empowers your business. Southwest Airlines discovered that profits were a by-product of serving the customer and have enjoyed a 30-year run of profitability.

This next exercise helps you profile who your brand serves and the primary benefit that drives your customer relationship. It's important to note that the derived Brand Lover Statement is used internally to help guide your interaction with the customer. If, however, you're ever in doubt as to what to do next with your brand, you should always ask your customer. Sam Walton would often tell his executives: "If you don't know what to do, go ask the customer. If it's not happening in the store, it is not important."

Brand-Lover Statement Exercise

*In order to develop a powerful brand that connects with your customers, you have to keep in mind your brand's meaningful attributes. What makes you unique? What does your brand do best? What are the attributes that attract your customers to you? Ultimately, everyone on your team must know who your business especially serves. If you want to be well-positioned in the marketplace, you must **sacrifice and focus**.*

Step 1: Imagine Your Brand Lover

Imagine you're walking through a dark forest and you come upon a house. This house represents your brand. Inside this house is everything amazing and powerful about your brand—all the good things your customers love about you.

As you're imagining this house, picture your best customers—the ones that are crazy about your business—sitting around this house. Describe your best customers with revealing adjectives beyond demographics—describe what they are like and what they love about being in your house. You're deconstructing your Brand Lover.

List the words that bring your customer to life. In the case of Harley-Davidson, we can use words like: freedom-seekers, rebels, full of life, weekend warriors, party people that don't want to get old, etc. Use words that describe why the customer congregates in this house called your brand.

From this list, choose the best descriptors of customers. List the top three attributes:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Step 2: Highlight Internal Frame of Reference

Now, look around the “house.” What are the best attributes that describe your company? What would you tell someone else about your business? How does your company perceive itself? What words best describe your business? What does your business *really* do? This is your business’s internal frame of reference. Use the words that describe you. In the case of Harley-Davidson, we could say motorcycle maker, innovators, passionate for great ideas, etc. The point is to capture the very essence of what you are about:

Now, narrow down your answers to the top two or three attributes:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Step 3: Highlight External Frame of Reference

Now, imagine you're inside the house, looking out the window at the people standing outside. What might these people say about your house? What would your customers or prospects say about your business? What would they say they get from doing business with you?

Someone looking into the Harley-Davidson house might see leather, an open road, freedom-riding, etc. Use words that describe your business as others might perceive you:

Now, narrow down your answers to the top two or three descriptions:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Step 4: Determine the Primary Brand Lover Benefit

What does the Brand Lover (whose identity was determined in Step 1) love? What is the primary benefit he or she derives from doing business with you? In this step, be careful not to jump to a conclusion too fast. Thoughtfully consider what your customers get out of the relationship with your business. This benefit has to be something the Brand Lover really loves.

This step is tricky because what you want is the *real* benefit here, not just what the benefit might appear to be on the surface. Harley-Davidson sells motorcycles, but as we know from our study of Cult Brands, Harley-Davidson offers their customers an experience and affirms their values: freedom on the open road. Think carefully about the true benefit your customers derive.

Narrow down your answers to the top one to three benefits before moving on to Step 5:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Step 5: Create the Brand-Lover Statement

You have done all the hard work of thinking and defining your Brand Lovers and the relationship you have with them.

Integrating the distinctions from the four elements above, we're going to capture the essence of your Brand Lover into one statement. This statement represents the goal of your business. Everything you do in your business—every decision you make towards building a Cult Brand—should be aligned with the Brand-Lover Statement.

By Harley-Davidson understanding they're in the business of selling an experience, the company can put more emphasis on events like bike rallies and other initiatives where the real worth of the brand is expressed. Every company decision either supports the relationship with the brand lover or it weakens it.

Here's a basic format for structuring your Brand-Lover Statement:

Especially for _____
[Insert Brand Lover]
_____ is the _____ and
[Insert company name] [Insert internal frame of reference]
_____ that _____
[Insert external frame of reference] [Insert primary brand benefit]

Here's an example we constructed using Harley-Davidson to help you understand how to put it all together:

Especially for freedom seekers (The Brand Lover), Harley-Davidson (The Company Name) is a rugged, passionate motorcycle maker (The Internal Frame of Reference) who provides the freedom of riding on the open road (The External Frame of Reference), allowing its customers to escape from the hardships and feelings of being tied down that encumber their daily lives (The Primary Brand Benefit).

Use this space to write out your Brand-Lover Statement:

STAGE 3: UNDERSTAND YOUR BRAND LOVER'S HUMAN NEEDS

Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal. Also, no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives.

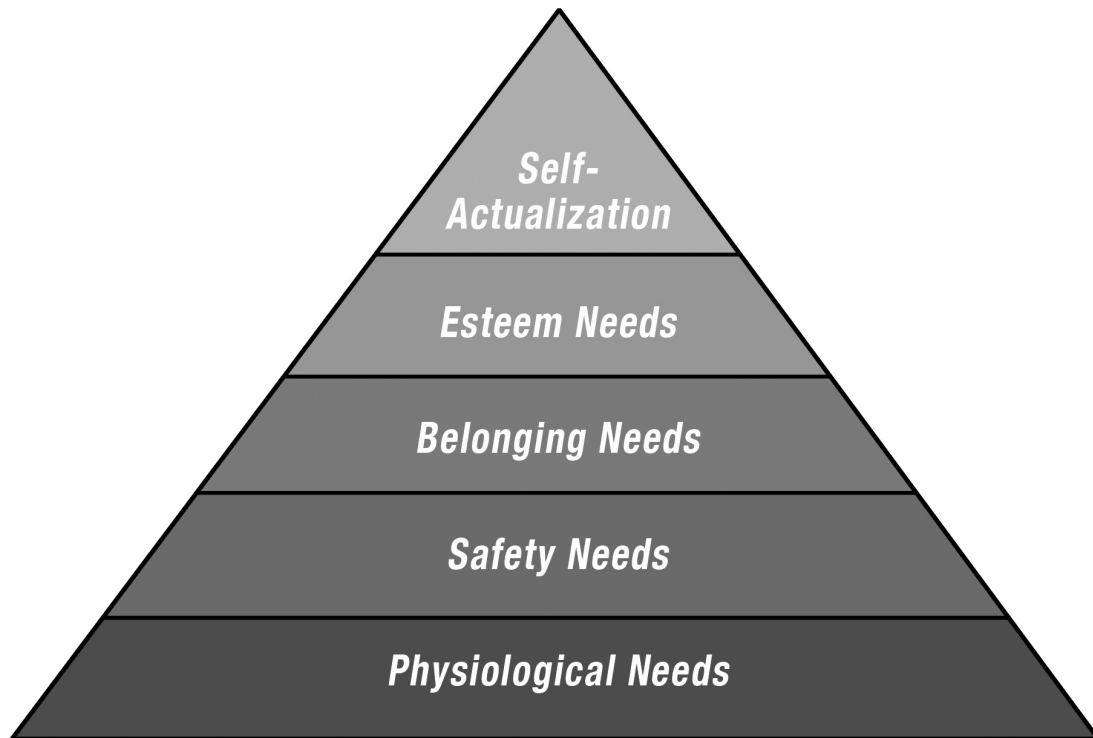
—Abraham Maslow

Determining the connection between customer loyalty and Cult Brands (“*What makes something a Cult Brand?*”) has been wrought with lots of questions and relatively few answers. For example, we know that certain brands enjoy incredible customer loyalty and devotion, with the customers willing to do anything to support the brand they love. But why? Why are certain brands so significant and meaningful to some customers that they tell the world about them? What makes them go that extra mile?

Understanding basic human needs are paramount to understanding the life force of your business: your customers. The late, great psychologist Abraham Maslow provided perhaps the most succinct and accurate understanding of these basic human needs in what’s now popularly known as *The Hierarchy of Human Needs*. We encourage you to read Maslow’s work (several of his key texts are listed in the Bibliography of this workbook). Meanwhile, here’s a basic summary:

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs

Maslow postulated that humans have an ascending order of needs and used a hierarchal pyramid to prioritize them. At the bottom levels of the pyramid are our physiological needs, like food, shelter, and clothing, that we need to survive. As these needs are met, progressively higher needs present themselves: safety and security, social interaction, and self-esteem, all topped by self-actualization, a term Maslow used to describe the ultimate human need to learn, grow, and reach one’s full potential.



MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF HUMAN NEEDS

Physiological Needs

These needs can be divided into two categories:

1. The first category is made up of needs that are homeostatic--the need to maintain an internal, biological balance--and include such things as salt concentration, sugar concentration, and water concentration in the blood. If a substance is out of balance, there will be a desire to consume foods that bring these levels back into balance.
2. The second category includes those needs that are not homeostatic, such as sleep and the sex drive.

Both of these categories are deeply rooted in the biological systems of the body. More importantly, if one were to strip a person of material possessions and psychological identity, physiological needs would be the primary driver of that person's behavior. All actions would be directed at satisfying basic needs, and the person would acquire an outlook such that the ideal environment would be one where these needs were satisfied.

Near a large bike rally, Wal-Mart noticed that for temperatures above 88 degrees, beer sales went down and water sales went up.

In modern societies, it is rare for anyone to experience this level of physiological-driven motivation. It would be even rarer to find an individual who is completely dissatisfied for an extended duration of time.

Safety Needs

Once the physiological needs are satisfied, safety needs emerge. These include the need for security and stability. If you were to strip someone of everything but their physiological needs, the safety needs would become their primary motivator, but not with the same sense of urgency as the physiological needs.

As with the physiological needs, modern society ensures that the safety needs are sufficiently satisfied for the vast majority of adults. The safety needs occur on smaller scales and are seen in people's desires for certainty: job stability and insurance policies—a general preference for the known over the unknown.

Belongingness and Love Needs

When the physiological and safety needs are met, the belonging needs emerge next. These needs include the need for affection, relationships, and belongingness, as to a group. In daily life, people exhibit these needs in their desire to marry, have a family, be a part of a community, a member of a church, a brother in a fraternity, a member of a gang, or a member of a bowling club. Belonging is also a part of what they look for in a career. This need reveals why consumers choose to be part of brands that offer them connection and belonging, such as Jimmy Buffett's *Parrotheads* or Harley-Davidson's *H.O.G.*

It is at this level that the support and social structure of modern society becomes insufficient to fulfill a person's needs. Modern society shows its fragmentation in the breakdown of traditional groups. Increased mobility has left many feeling disconnected and unfulfilled. The importance of neighborhoods and families to an individual's well-being has been overlooked. Moreover, there's no indication this fragmentation is going to slow down. Maslow cited these unmet needs as being the primary cause for mental disorders. He commented, "We have largely forgotten our deep animal tendencies to herd, to flock, to join, to belong."¹

¹ Maslow, *Personality and Motivations*, 20.

Esteem Needs

Maslow divided the next level in the hierarchy into two categories: the need for esteem from others and the need for self-esteem. The need for esteem from others is met externally and includes the want of status and dominance, while the need for self-esteem is met internally and includes the want of independence and mastery.

Maslow believed the healthiest way to satisfy the esteem needs was to have both the internal and external esteem needs met as a result of a person's authentic nature, so that any respect gained would be merited rather than derived from the presentation of a fake self.

Self-Actualization

At the top of the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization. By this, Maslow meant the need to be what one has the potential to become. In *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow wrote:

Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are ultimately to be at peace with themselves. What humans *can* be they *must* be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization ... It refers to people's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, the tendency for them to become actualized in what they are potentially.²

The needs lower in the hierarchy are able to be satisfied, and, therefore, cease to motivate the individual. However, the need for self-actualization cannot be satisfied, and any satisfaction that is gained only serves to further motivate the individual.

² Ibid., 22.

Why the Hierarchy of Needs is a Crucial Tool for Branding

Perhaps the most important thing to take away from Maslow's *Hierarchy of Human Needs* is his realization that all human beings start fulfilling their needs at the bottom levels of the pyramid. In short, we fill our lower physiological needs first. Higher needs like safety, esteem, and social interaction are insignificant when one's drive is to survive. What is important to keep in mind is that these needs do not emerge in an all-or-none fashion; the majority of people in a modern society have all of their needs partially met, with the lower needs having a greater level of fulfillment than the higher needs. The higher needs are, therefore, greater generators of desire than the lower needs. As Maslow noted, "Man is a perpetually wanting animal."³

This quick refresher on Maslow and his *Hierarchy of Human Needs* is helpful because many of Maslow's findings reveal what makes companies with Cult Brands so successful. Maslow's writings expose the underlying drivers of human behavior and decision-making. He never mentions "brand loyalty" in his books, but his *Hierarchy of Human Needs* and concepts like self-actualization are key to understanding why consumers consistently choose one brand over another and enjoy such strong relationships with them.

The makers of Cult Brands aren't like mainstream marketers whose focus is largely on selling "feature-benefits" from the bottom of the pyramid to their customers. Rather, Cult Branders enjoy incredible loyalty because they work hard to connect with their customers at the very highest levels of Maslow's *Hierarchy*. Cult Brands all have products and services with great "feature-benefits," but their products and services also fulfill the high-level needs of esteem, social interaction, and self-actualization found at the top of Maslow's *Hierarchy*.

So, why is fulfilling higher level needs so integral to building customer loyalty? The answer: higher level needs influence future human behavior much more than lower level needs. The brands that can fulfill human needs on the higher levels of the hierarchy become irreplaceable in the mind of the customer, the key to customer loyalty. True customer loyalty is not only about getting a customer to consistently choose your brand over another—it's for that same customer to always believe (and tell the world) that your brand has no equal!

³ Maslow, *The Maslow Business Reader*, 3.

Discovering Your Customer's Human Needs

The following four questions will help you uncover the basic needs your products/services fill so that you can discover new ways of fulfilling the Brand Lover's higher level needs.

1) What products/services do you offer?

2) What are ALL the features of these products? (List all the attributes of your product. In the case of a car, you might say anti-lock breaks, more efficient gas engine, etc.)

3) What are ALL the benefits of these products? Every great feature has its twin: the benefit. After all, we don't love seat belts; we love the benefit of surviving an accident. List each benefit and how it relates to each feature.

4) What fundamental human needs does the product fulfill? This is the big question. The human need is not just about a single benefit or a great feature; it's all about what does it do for your customer as a human being on a deep level. Where are you hitting home? Go back to Maslow and find out what need your customer has. Write down how fulfilling this need is expressed in your business.

Serving the Customer Within

Now that you've identified how your product affects customers and the benefit(s) they derive at a core level, it's time to consider the "internals" of serving customers that love you. One of the most important aspects of creating loyal customers is listening to what they are saying in the marketplace. Those that adopt methods of serving the customer efficiently have a chance to become powerful brands.

Does your company really listen to the feedback and suggestions of its most loyal followers? What are these customers saying? Write their opinions below.

Customers want to be appreciated. They want their suggestions to be heard and used. How do you reward your best customers? If you haven't been rewarding them, do it quickly before someone else does!

Every company can do more to show its customers appreciation for their business. What are new ways you can show your customers that you "listen" and that you appreciate them?

Applying the Golden Rule of Social Groups

Maslow revealed our basic human need to belong. This understanding helps us tap into the Golden Rule of Social Groups: consumers want to be part of a group that's different.

What groups are naturally forming around your product or service? No matter how small the group, the power of a group can make a significant impact on your business. Look around: are there any groups of people that can form a cohesive group that you can support?

Now it's time to make your brand *insanely* different. List your craziest ideas that make you independent of the culture that runs your industry. Customers love to find groups that are different. How different can you be?

Applying the Golden Rule of Fun

The highest human need according to Maslow is self-actualization. Cult Brands don't just sell a product or a service, they develop and sell "the tools" that allow followers of their brands to pursue their dreams and celebrate distinct, new lifestyles. This brings us to the **Golden Rule of Fun**: *Cult Brands sell lifestyles.*

Is your brand fun? Does it make your customers happy and make them feel good about themselves? How can you help your customers have more fun?

What are the passions and dreams of your customers? How can your brand help fulfill these wants? List them below.

Followers of Cult Brands are buying into a lifestyle—not just a product or a service. What is the lifestyle your customers are really seeking?

Applying the Golden Rule of Contribution

Another Cult Branding rule taps into the human needs of love and belonging. Cult Brands always give back to their brand lovers. They are adamant about continually finding new ways to show their love and appreciation for the passion and devotion of their customers. Cult-Brand companies build strong, ongoing relationships with their customers by developing and supporting customer communities. Cult-Brand companies aren't afraid to put aside short-term profits in favor of creating customer communities that generate powerful long-term halo effects on their businesses and their brands.

How do you communicate and stay in touch with your customers? Do you have a newsletter, a mailing list, or a fan festival?

Customer communities are invaluable branding tools. What are new ways you can build a “sense of community” around your brand?

Cult Brands always give back. What are some organizations and causes that your customers would love to see your brand support?

Applying the Golden Rule of Openness

Cult Brands are incredibly open and inclusive, once again filling the human need of belonging, as well as self-esteem and self-actualization. Cult Brands become giant support groups for like-minded individuals. They never get caught up in building imaginary profiles of ideal customers. Cult Brands don't discriminate. They openly embrace everyone and anyone who is interested in their companies. Cult Brands welcome with open arms customers of all ages, races, creeds, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Is your own brand already open and inclusive, or have you focused only on targeting ideal customer segments? Why?

Cult Brands help fulfill deep human needs that customers of all backgrounds share. What human needs can/does your brand fulfill?

How can you take the human needs you just identified and make them even more intertwined and visible within your brand?

STAGE 4: ADDRESS KEY TOUCH POINTS

A brand is all the information and ideas associated with a product or service; this combination creates a distinct customer experience. Even small things like your business cards communicate a “brand” message to your customer.

Always keep in mind that your brand is a co-authored experience with your customer. You can’t force an experience on your customer—you can only set up the conditions necessary for potentially allowing the desired customer experience to unfold. A great sandwich shop offers a combination of high-quality, good-tasting products and consistent, good service. If the shop starts using old sandwich meat or stale bread, the conditions are not favorable for a positive experience.

Understanding Brand Dimension

As we have discussed, at the center of every business is the customer. There are three important dimensions that affect the customer’s experience: the Offering, the Space, and the Time. These three dimensions affect how your customers experience your brand and they are *the only factors your business can fine tune in order to attract customers*. Inside of these three dimensions, the customer can be exposed to unique factors that help shape their experience(s).

Offering: The offering is simply the product or service you are giving potential customers that benefits them—emotionally and/or intellectually. People think it’s logical to buy a motorcycle if they want to own a bike, but it’s emotional to want to belong to Harley Owners Group (HOG). The *benefits* of being associated with your offering are powerful attractors to your business.

Space: Where do you do business? For some brands this means finding the right location. As the old retail adage says, “location, Location, LOCATION!” Smart pharmacies have found that it’s best to open stores in local neighborhoods because their brands serves the sick family. Space doesn’t only refer to occupying physical space—it can also relate to the environment you create for your customers to do business. In the case of Bass Pro Shops, the store is designed to look like the Great Outdoors.

Whether you're running an Internet business or a retail store, there's a *space* where your brand will live. It's important to contextualize this space to help your customer experience your brand promise in a sensory way, from how your Web site looks and feels, to the architecture of your building's exterior, to your storefront's location.

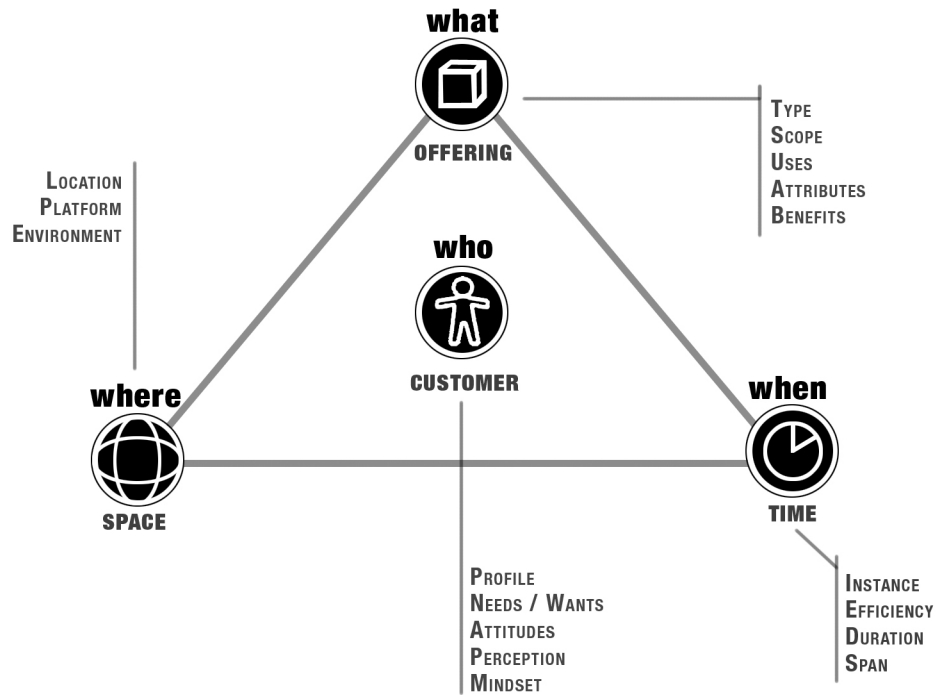
- Jimmy Buffett's original Margaritaville is located in Key West, Florida. Jimmy's brand occupies a physical space in a place many of his fans like to think of as Mecca.
- Space is very important when you walk into an Apple store—you can *feel* the Apple Brand.

Space is powerful as it helps give the consumer a unique experience.

Time: Falling snow indicates a change of seasons; for retailers, it also indicates a shift—the change of *time* shifts what the consumer needs *now*. For example, at Hallmark, Valentine's Day cards are sold mostly during early February. Time also represents the span of the customer relationship. It can refer to time spent at your store (which you may want to increase). Time can also signify that moment when customers feel they need you. Time is important—it reveals when you will be relevant to your customer. Your insurance needs to be renewed; your car needs to be serviced; your rent needs to be paid. Every business has certain time factors that establish a kind of rhythm with their customers.

Customer: The center of these three factors is the purpose and fuel of your business: your customer. You must discern who your business serves best—your Brand Lover. You must be able to describe your customers in terms of their needs and wants, attitudes, mindsets, and perceptions of the world, not simply demographics like age, geography, and social conditions. In order to understand the customer dimension better, consider creating a sketch of your customer to give you some insight into who your business best serves. Understand their needs and wants, gain insight into their attitudes about doing business and how they live their life. What are their perceptions about the world? And most importantly, what is the mindset of this customer? The more you know, the more on-target you will be when it comes to helping your customers understand your brand and influencing them to trust your brand most.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE CUSTOMER'S EXPERIENCE



Everything the brand does lives within these three dimensions and affects the customer experience. To make this practical, we must reach inside your brand and find your customer touch points—your public relations efforts, your business cards, your Web sites, the name of your business and the use of your logo, brochures, and other promotional tools.

Evaluating Your Touch Points

Examine all the critical touch points, or ways in which your customer interacts with you by following these instructions:

1. From the chart on the next page, determine which touch points are the most important for you to begin focusing on immediately to enhance communication with your Brand Lover.
2. Rank each touch point's frequency of use from one to five, with one being very low or none and five being very high usage.
3. Next, rank how effective (from the customer's viewpoint) you believe you are in implementing each touch point.
4. Finally, review the frequency of use and related effectiveness of each touch point. Think about what needs to change in each of your critical touch points from the perspective of your Brand Lover and capture your ideas in the "Tomorrow's Plans" column.

Potential Touch Points	Frequency of Use	Today's Effectiveness	Tomorrow's Plans
Names (product & company)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Publicity / Public Relations	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Customer Relationships	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Partnerships / Alliances	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Recruiting / Training	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Sales / Marketing	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Customer Service	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Culture	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Intellectual Capital	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Physical Environment	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Conferences	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Web Sites	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
E-mail Communication	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	

Potential Touch Points	Frequency of Use	Today's Effectiveness	Tomorrow's Plans
Sponsorships	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Collateral	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Direct Mail	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Advertising	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Logos / Design / Colors	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Visual Language	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Organizational Structure	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Products / Services	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Value Chains	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Business Models	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Other:	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Other:	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	

Your “Big Three”

From the list above, choose three touch points you know you can immediately improve in order to help your customers more clearly understand what you do.

For example, you may have noted that your “Physical Environment” has extremely high frequency as a touch point and, incidentally, there is major room for improvement. You may determine that you can improve this touch point by cleaning up the check-out area (by the cash register) and better-organizing the shelf merchandise.

Touch Point 1: _____

We will improve this touch point for the customer by: _____

Touch Point 2: _____

We will improve this touch point for the customer by: _____

Touch Point 3: _____

We will improve this touch point for the customer by: _____

STAGE 5: TRANSLATE YOUR IDEAS INTO CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

If you've made it this far into the process, congratulations! You probably already know infinitely more about your customers than the average business person (and yes, that includes those running your competition!). Now it's time to begin translating the distinctions you've uncovered into your brand's Look, Say, and Feel. As a marketer, you control to a large extent the creation and implementation of these three important variables into your brand, differentiating your brand from the pack.

Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, intuition must be integrated with the knowledge and distinctions you've discovered about your customer to create your Cult Brand. Unfortunately, giving general directions at this stage is challenging; however, there are a few critical questions that may serve this process. Before answering these questions, go back and reread your Brand-Lover Statement and be sure to keep your Brand Lover in mind as you answer the following questions.

Look, Say, Feel

Determine the creative elements most aligned to your Brand Lover.

LOOK

People say we shouldn't "judge a book by its cover." That's true, but most people don't get past the cover. So the cover has a lot to do with how the book sells. The important distinction about *look* is that it has nothing to do with fancy or slick—you simply need to find an image that connects with your customers.

What images represent the emotional connection you have with your customer? When you look at your business's primary benefits, how do they relate to the great moments in your customer's world? Volkswagen chose to introduce the Beetle on a blank canvas (with no people in the ad) because company officials felt the car itself was the image that would rekindle the love of previous, loyal VW Beetle customers.

SAY

Words are powerful. They carry meaning and information. Remember when Wendy's had the commercials with the older lady that screamed, "Where's the beef?" People loved those commercials because it gave the consumer a voice—people wanted more meat in their burgers. In a more recent example, think of the new Apple iPod commercials: no words are used—the dancers say it all.

What does your company want to communicate to the world? If you had the opportunity to articulate what your brand stands for, what would you say?

FEEL

If *what* you say is important, *how* you say it matters even more. When we say *feel*, think of a song. Some songs make you feel happy, some make you think of the future, some remind you of the past. Music has a “feel,” people have a “feel,” and brands have a “feel”—they communicate nonverbally. The *feel* emanates to the people around you; to your customers. When you get on a Southwest Airlines flight, you feel welcomed. You sense that these people like you.

What is your brand’s attitude? What tone or vibe does your brand convey? What is the *feel* of your brand?

STAGE 6: SELL-IN TO YOUR INTERNAL TEAM

Now, it's time to develop training tools for selling-in to the internal team. EVERY team member must understand and embrace the Brand Lover because EVERY member of your organization, in some shape or form, affects the customer's experience.

Embracing your Customer from the Inside Out

When Ivan Pavlov did his famous experiment and rang a bell, man's best friend, the dog, began to salivate. Most of branding's ambiguity is solved with this study: connect the bell (your products or services) with the meat (the customer's needs) and the customers salivate: branding occurs.

Despite the theatrical ease with which branding is allegedly created, most companies fail in their brand efforts for one simple reason: they forget to "sell-in" to their internal team. Brands cannot live in print materials or mission statements; they must be expressed each day by everyone in the organization. In reality, each member of your team is either serving the brand or defacing it.

I believe a major misconception in branding is that it's the responsibility of the marketing department to build and manage the brand. In truth, when a brand fails, it's because the customer never embraced the *whole business* (instead, they went to the competition to meet their needs). Brands fail at an organizational level, not because of a single department or individual. Customers buy the whole business—not just the pricing, or distribution, or even the graphical interpretation of the brand. *Branding* designates the customer's whole experience with a company. *Marketing* reflects that experience to the customer. Put simply, effective branding is a company-wide initiative.

Each team member must clearly understand how he or she contributes to the customer's experience. American Airlines rarely reports to baggage claim agents and mechanical staff the overall health of their business, causing endless entanglements between management and associates that often send the company into gridlock. In contrast, the folks at Southwest Airlines purposely write their annual financial reports using a third-grade reading level so baggage claim personnel will be able to better understand the business they serve. To anyone observing the airline business, it's obvious that if the team members on the floor are not packing the right bags into the right planes, the

customer is going to have a horrible brand experience no matter what the company promises in its advertising.

Before you tell the world about your brand, your entire company must have a clear understanding of your brand's purpose. When Southwest Airlines advertises that *you are free to move about the country* (referring to their low fares), they owe this promise to the ground crew. If everyone at Southwest Airlines was pushing for a different agenda and the team lacked synergy, the brand would die—the planes would never leave the ground. Southwest Airlines clearly understands the value of selling in, and continues a thirty-year tradition of profitability, due most significantly to its people.

Tips on Selling-in to Your Enterprise

Each organization has its own cultural ways of synthesizing new information. This is important to note in the context of selling-in: you must carefully consider which tools best fit your organization.

- *Inspire through conversation.* Building successful brands depends significantly on how much attention you are paying to your associates, the marketplace, and your customer. If you want to grow quickly, start inspiring your people with meaningful conversations that reverberate throughout the organization.
- *Teach your teams.* Don't just write stuff down in a memo and expect people to do something with it. Every brand needs advocates—people who defend it and teach its philosophies to others. The more internal and external evangelists, the better. Make sure you are teaching your brand rather than burying its distinctive elements in words on paper.
- *Become a walking presentation.* One way to teach your team about your Brand Lover is to create a Microsoft PowerPoint® presentation that clearly illustrates who your Brand Lover is and who you are in the context of that Brand Lover. This presentation can be used one-on-one, in your leadership meetings, and at company-wide events.
- *Bring the brand to life.* Create a video, post pictures of your best customers around the office, pass on compliments from clients to the entire staff, etc. Give your brand's successes a voice. The more ways you have of showing your brand as alive and growing, the more likely your team members will be to know how to keep building this brand.

- *Bring your customer to life.* Spend a day in your customer's life. Show your staff a day of your customer's life. Give your team members the opportunity to see what it might be like to be the customer—help them to see how your product plays a part in the customer's day or life. Have them consider how they affect the customer's day, even though sometimes customers don't recognize their efforts (for instance, the Southwest Airlines mechanics are unseen but without them, the ultimate brand promise is not filled).
- *Create a customer definition.* One of my favorite ways to help sell-in is to define the customer your business serves. By giving your customer dimension and depth, your team members will have more empathy for the customer. Once everyone in your organization is serving your customer, your branding efforts will happen spontaneously.
- *Check with your Brand Lover first.* Consistently refer to your Brand-Lover Statement. Is this initiative adding value to the customer? Is it building the relationship I have with my Brand Lover? Knowing your business was made to serve your Brand Lover helps your company to focus on its Brand Lover when each decision is made.

You must create a vision that your entire organization can be passionate about. Stop doing “business as usual.” Focus on your team and start “selling-in.” Ensure that your people are ready to serve your Brand Lover well. If you want your customers to love you, you have to love everything that makes them love you first.

STAGE 7: PUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

Imagination and Hard Work Come Next

Your customer will not buy from you because you completed the exercises in this workbook, or because you're having another meeting today. Until your brand interacts and plays with the customer, nothing will happen. The information we have collected here serves as a *tool* to help you make better decisions related to your Brand Lover.

In 1980, Harley-Davidson was bankrupt and on the verge of collapse. When most employees and investors were running away from the company, thirteen brave executives decided to buy the defunct company for \$80 million and turn the business around by embracing the customer.

I once had the honor of working with a small business person who credits his survival to rebuilding his retail store. This reinvention was his only marketing move and it paid off. Tactically choosing which touch points you will transform first will be determined by the strategy you've developed to reform your brand.

These exercises were designed to help you refocus on your customer—or more specifically, on your Brand Lover. Now, you must use these distinctions and strategies to begin building trust with your customers. If your store shelves are not properly stocked, no amount of advertising can save you. If your online ordering process frustrates your users, you won't give the customer a positive experience with your brand. Spend your branding dollars wisely in the places where you can create meaningful relationships with your Brand Lover. Cult Brands have executed a wide range of tactics to build their relationships with their Brand Lovers, from giving away Italian subs before a wrestling match (WWE) to offering adventure tours for bike owners (Harley-Davidson).

Many times, when you focus on transforming your business to serve your Brand Lover, the strategies and tactics you employ may seem counterintuitive from the perspective of converting the masses. But don't worry. You don't need 100 percent of the market to be a Cult Brand. Apple Computers is profitable with less than 10 percent of the market.

Embrace the Golden Rule of Freedom

Cult Branders are daring, courageous, and determined when embracing their customers, in spite of doubters and critics. Believe in yourself and your products and services. Don't just challenge conventional wisdom, shatter it whenever the chance presents itself. Be willing to take significant risks to make your brand stand out. Never fear failure.

With big risks often come big rewards. What is the biggest branding-related risk your company has taken in its history? In the past year?

What's a marketing idea that your company decided was too risky to pursue? Write it down. Does it challenge conventional wisdom? Will it serve your Brand Lover?

That which doesn't kill a Cult Brand makes it stronger. Write down your brand's marketing failures. Be honest. Learn from your mistakes.

We have to discover how to make the critical few talk and enjoy their relationship with the brand.

Break the Rules and Stand Out

There was a hot sauce manufacturer with very little money who wanted to advertise. They could afford one billboard. Rather than simply post their ad, they burned the entire area around their billboard—even singeing the wood that held up the billboard. Consumers loved it and their business grew.

Southwest Airlines grew their business by offering a cocktail in the air before anyone else. It was a simple offering that their customers appreciated. Sometimes you have to defy the marketplace, break the rules, and disturb the balance of power.

List all the rules that run your category. How does everyone do it?

Disrupt the balance of power. List every idea you can think of that breaks those rules.

Now, identify the freshest, most inventive ideas—those that inspire you to push forward and be completely different from the pack.

Define the competition and draw strength from your enemies. Every great brand that stands for something has an archenemy—something they fight against. Who or what is your brand's archenemy?

How do (or can) you draw strength from your enemy?

Great brands are vibrant and growing every day. They learn from their mistakes and their victories. They execute and win often; though sometimes they pull the trigger too early or too late and fall short. There is no process in the world that can guarantee you results, but what you now have in your hands can help you create effective strategies for getting better results.

FINAL WORDS

If you've made it this far, you're obviously committed to better serving your customer and growing your business. Taking the time to capture your ideas on paper can seem arduous and pointless, especially when we are dealing with the hard subject of building powerful brands.

Your marketing success completely depends on your ability to really get to know your customers and what they want and to use this information to guide future decisions for your business.

Keep the customer close and the Brand Lover closer and you'll enjoy an amazing relationship with your customers.

CEO: "Thanks, I have to run now; time to get to work. Wish me luck!"

Cult Branding: "Good luck, and onward!"

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In Nonbox Consulting, our Consumer Insight Think Tank, we use the concept of the “collective hive” to describe the synergistic energy the group creates that helps our ideas evolve. The collective group effort of our team—Melissa, Salim, Ozzie, Joe, Joze, Aaron, Bill, and Scott—cannot be overstated.

To Scott Jeffrey for his constant encouragement, back and forth dialoguing, ideation, and creative structuring.

To Misty Williams for her exceptional editorial and word-crafting abilities.

To Melissa Thornton for her creative brilliance with the interior design.

To Darryl Cobbin for his insights and inspiration into rallying around the Brand Lover.

To Mom for always being my Brand Lover.

To God for guidance, direction, and the creative force that pushed us through this journey to better understand the customers and how we can better serve them.

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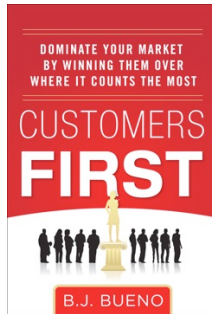
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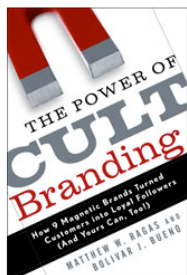


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