



Keeping Your Brand Promise

By Doug Fleener

More and more we hear and read about corporations and their "brand promise." The promise is made to the customer, is a guiding principle for company employees and in theory is reflected in the company's approach to everything it does. While a mission statement looks inward to what a company stands for, a brand promise is external. It defines what the customer can expect from the brand and the positive impact that brand will have on a customer's life.

I believe the best brand promise any retailer can make is a guaranteed memorable customer experience. Many retailers like to think they do this but our own shopping experience tells us that isn't the case. It's not easy to deliver that memorable experience and you won't do it unless you are specifically trying to do so. The reason is that those who create these brand promises fail to realize that the ultimately the promise is kept or broken by the frontline employee. Much like a mission statement, it's just words until the rubber meets the road.

For any retail brand promise to be kept, all frontline employees must understand the promises and the actions they must take to fulfill them. If a retailer promises friendly and helpful employees then the store staff must engage the customer in an upbeat and friendly manner. Often the barrier to keeping these promises is put up by the very same executives who've created the promise. Many retailers have an "easy returns" brand promise for their customers but at the same time penalize store managers for having too many returns. When an internal policy, guideline, or metric is in conflict with a brand promise the promise will inevitably be broken.

Some brand promises are assumed by the customer even if the retailer doesn't state them. Customers assume that independent retailers give better service but have higher prices. Either may or may not be true.

While any one of your brand promises can help you attract a new customer, breaking any of your promises can lose them. Retailers probably lose more customers to a broken promise than they know. Those Silent Majority customers I wrote about recently will leave without telling you. This is why it is so important to measure how well you are executing your brand promise. Many retailers know the results of the promise (sales) or how well they are keeping the various facets of the promise for a few customers (mystery shops), but without data directly from the customer or feedback from the frontline it's tough to measure exactly how your promise is holding up.

Try this brand promise exercise. Take a sheet of paper and draw three columns. In the first column list the brand promises you've stated to your customer and the ones they are likely to assume. In the middle column list the accompanying frontline actions that you've communicated to your employees and trained them to take. In the third column, list the measurement, metric, or frontline feedback you use to measure how well you keep your promises

So let me ask, how's your brand promise?

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About the author: Doug Fleener is a veteran retailer with over 25 years of hands-on retail experience with world-class retailers including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores. In his ten years at Bose, Doug grew the Retail Direct Group from four to 100 stores and was instrumental in developing Bose's unique and engaging retail methods.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington, MA based retail and customer experience consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers improve their customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits.

Fleener is the author of the book *The Profitable Retailer: 56 surprisingly simple and effective lessons to boost your sales and profits*. He is a frequent speaker around the world on retail issues and his insights has been covered in leading business media including *The New York Times*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Shopping Centers Today*. Along with partner Matt Norcia they write the popular retail blog *Retail Contrarian*.

Doug lives in Lexington, Massachusetts with his wife and two daughters, where in his free time he barbecues while listening to Jimmy Buffet music.

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