

The Brand Promise

Amazon.com aspires to be the most customer-centric company on the planet. This is no idle phrase, nor is it easy work. Embedded in this proposition is a focus on what really motivates customers. Jeff Bezos has been quoted as saying he looks for not what will change with customers but what will stay constant. Web sites and channels change; fundamental human motivations are constant. The ways to appeal to those motivations change.

What is fundamental to customer motivations at Amazon? From my perspective people want to feel that they will be treated as a real person with real and unique needs. They want to be acknowledged. They want a provider to respect them. They want to be appreciated.

All of these motivations are reflected in the strategy and execution by Amazon. As a registered user you get personalized home pages, with recommendations tailored to your reading habits or product interests based on your click history with Amazon. You get immediate acknowledgements of your order and its shipment. You get fast checkout with one-click. The benefits to you as a customer squarely address your fundamental needs.

Delving into human motivations involves carefully listening to customers, but also often tempered with a sense for what customers are really saying.

Customers might have initially been afraid of “One-click.” They may have expressed concerns. “What if I clicked by mistake? What if I change my mind? How do I know my order was placed?” By anticipating these concerns, however, Amazon provided assurance statements -- “Your One-click order has been placed.” You can easily change your order up till shipment. Change your mind after that? No problem, you can send the product back, with no hassle or objection.

Intrinsic to Amazon’s approach to customer centricity also is a set of organizational values of doing the right thing for customers.

If the price drops on your video game after you purchase, they credit you the difference. If customers complain about their TV shipment, they let the comment stand on their customer blogs for all to see.

Amazon started as a company where execs worked their day jobs and then stuffed boxes at night.

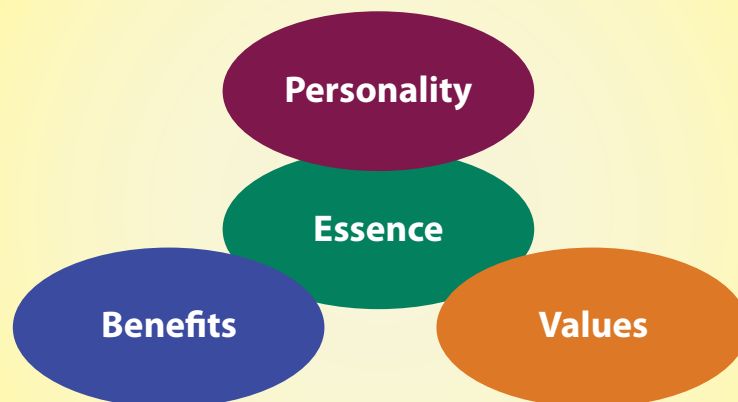
Professionals used doors on cinder blocks for desks. They improvised and innovated every step of the way. Amazon has a company personality of innovation. Southwest Airlines has been a maverick in the industry since its founding days. They only gave you peanuts when other airlines were serving hot meals, and they made fun of themselves for doing that. They have low fares. They don't charge for an extra bag. They have fast turns at the airport, and generally are on time.

They are the only airline on which I could say I had fun. Indeed, their flight attendants are recruited for customer friendly personalities. On a recent flight to Memphis, the flight attendant impersonated Elvis Presley and sang the departure announcements to the tune of Blue Suede Shoes. Everyone on board clapped. On another flight, the

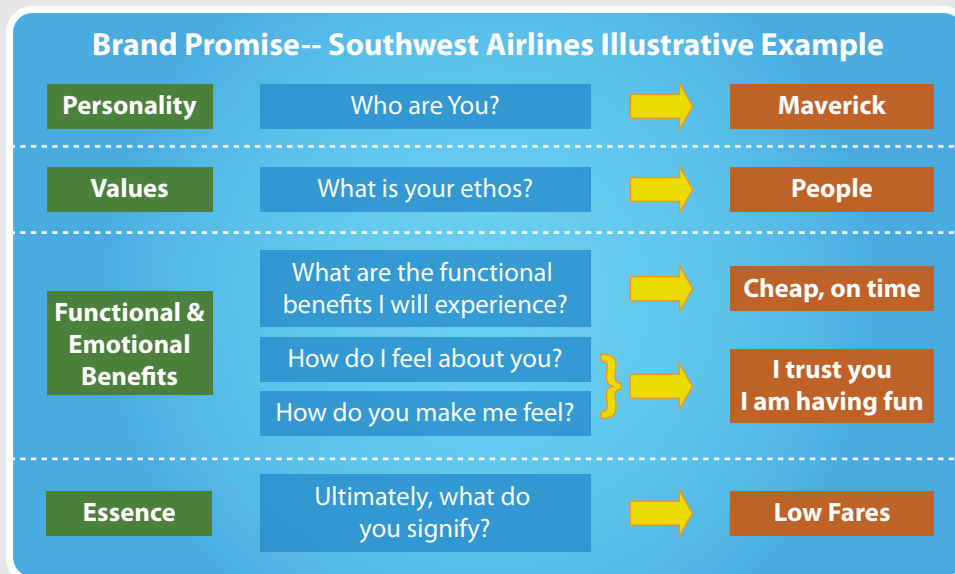
attendant singled out my then 18-year old son sitting on an aisle seat. After having made one pass through the cabin distributing peanuts, the attendant came back to my son and asked him if he wanted any more. My son said, "Sure." Whereupon the attendant proceeded to dump the entire remaining basket of about 100 bags of peanuts on my son's lap. He just acquired my son's lifetime loyalty to SWA.

Every brand has a story. Companies that view their brand as not just a logo, but a promise of a differentiated experience, and then execute on that promise to create these kinds of stories will win. In our work with companies looking to enhance their business through brand development and implementation, we apply the following brand model in developing a brand promise:

The Brand Promise – What Do You Stand For?



To make this model more concrete, let's see how it might apply to the Southwest Airlines:



In the above exhibit, you can see the SWA personality – as a maverick. Their values center on people, both their customers and their employees. They provide clear and distinct benefits throughout their customer experience. While the SWA experience is many things, all of which makes for a differentiated experience, their essence is their low fares. What could be better – low fares and fun, too!

What is your brand promise? Who are you as a brand? What do you value? What benefits set you apart? What is your essence, your basis to compete? And, have you purposefully built these attributes into the delivery of your customer experience?

Brand and brand management has evolved considerably from establishing a logo and communicating an image. That was the province of brand management of yesteryear. Today, brand development and execution must consider the total customer experience, developing a differentiated brand promise and then making it come alive in the touchpoints with customers.

If you would like to talk to us about how to build and measure your brand, feel free to contact us at the number listed below. We would be pleased to discuss how we might help with research and consulting.

Hansa provides a full range of qualitative and quantitative research services. Our experienced research and consulting team, including PhD-level statisticians, uses innovative, data-driven methodologies tailored to our clients' research needs.

We pride ourselves on our ability to truly understand the voice of the customer and translate that voice into winning strategies for brand development, marketing communications, customer relationship enhancement, and product/service innovation.