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## BrandAnimation: The Experience Strategy

By Erik Hauser



It seems like everyone's thoughts on marketing are being copyrighted these days (is that because of the advent of customer-generated content and wanting to separate the pros from the nonpros?), and many have attempted to turn their catchphrases into actual marketing strategies. Some of the strategies are seemingly quite complex.

I have a strong affinity for trademarks too. My trademarks, however, are usually relegated to the field of clever T-shirt catchphrases. If we took all the catchy phrases about the marketing strategies folks are putting on their book covers and ran them through a specially made BS incinerator, would anything be left? Would there be any universal truth that could resist the BS Test?

One certainly comes to mind. The one essential truth that shines through every strategy is that for a product or service to be successful it must start with a good or pleasant experience at the first customer touch point. That experience can be with the actual product or service, or it can be a great experience with the marketing initiatives themselves. The experiences can be external, or something can be designed to trigger a positive internal experience. Either way, it's the initial interaction/experience with a brand that helps the customers begin to define it as they see it and to bond with it or not.

So is it really that easy? Brands simply have to deliver a pleasant experience?

Why is it a surprise that a good or pleasant interaction, all by itself, gets people talking? We've always known that if we have a good experience with anything we tell our circle of friends and family. It comes from our basic human desire to share. We want those close to us to have the same great experiences that we've had, and we want to talk about them. Outside the close circle, we also want to share what we know with those we meet as a way of helping or of showing our expertise or knowledge.

This is what most people refer to as word of mouth (WOM). But WOM is not the strategy being used. I really don't even see WOM as a strategy. I apologize in advance if the idea offends anyone professionally.

The strategy that is actually being used in that situation is the experience strategy. Deliver a great experience, and people will talk. When people talk about WOM as a strategy or a method,



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they are really talking about an experience marketing strategy.

Without the initial great experience the conversation never starts --or if it does, it's the opposite of what you want. It becomes a conversation that damages the brand, because a bad experience will spread even faster than positive interactions customers have with a company and its products or services.

So in terms of marketing, put all trademarks, catchphrases, and copyrights aside for the moment, and let's agree. It all begins and ends with experience--yours, mine, and ours--and what we talk about and share with the world around us.

*Erik Hauser is creative director/founder of San Francisco-based marketing firm Swivel Media and founder of IXMA, the International Experiential Marketing Association. He also moderates the [Experiential Marketing Forum](#).*

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