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## **Show Some Brand Love**

By Andrea Syverson

*Start thinking about your brand with your heart*

When was the last time you talked about love in your company meetings? Or passion? Or charisma? Or devotion? Perhaps it's time to add those topics to your next agenda; not because it's Valentine's month, but because it's the right thing to do all year long. When I facilitate and participate in strategic intradepartmental branding meetings with my clients, these words are always part of our conversations.

I am not alone. Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, has written two branding books filled with words like these. He actually coined a new one, "Lovemarks," to describe brands that go beyond the expected. Roberts writes, "Lovemarks are the brands, events and experiences that people love. Not just like or admire, but love—passionately." If you haven't already done so, I encourage you not only to read both his books, ("Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands" and "The Lovemarks Effect"), but to put into practice thinking with your heart about your brand.

### **Start at the Top**

Brand love is an inside job, and it starts at the top. It should go without saying, but brand leaders must love what they do. If they aren't passionate about their brands, products and/or services, they need to go elsewhere and follow their hearts to new vocations.

More than a decade ago, when I was a merchant at Current Inc., I was mentored by two bosses who loved what they did. They were passionate, dedicated, entrepreneurial professionals who inspired and challenged me each and every day. I feel that way now about many of my clients. They are born leaders in roles that are perfect fits for their strengths and gifts. Over the past 10 years, I've been honored to watch them lead large and small companies, nonprofits and charitable organizations with genuine charisma and passion.

I watch as their employees develop and grow under their servant leadership. These leaders have the utmost respect for their employees. It's a win-win. The way employees are treated by their companies is indeed the way employees treat their customers. Think Southwest, think Zappos. These are just two of many examples of brand leaders who show radical love to their employees, who then naturally translate that love into superior customer service.

Kim Feil, Walgreens' new CMO, recently said, "I believe that the fundamental caring that our organization has for people is something that will be one of the most distinguishing characteristics in defining who Walgreens is." As a leader, how do you demonstrate love and respect to your employees?

### **Put the Customer First**

Treat every customer as an extraordinary stakeholder. True "lovemarks" have been practicing this behavior long before Roberts coined the word. Wal-Mart Founder Sam Walton understood this concept many years ago, and this philosophy has helped make Wal-Mart the world's largest retailer. "There is only one boss," he said. "The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down simply by spending his money somewhere else."

L.L.Bean, whose guiding philosophy was to "sell good merchandise at a reasonable profit and treat your customers like human beings," understands this. Additionally, consider the wisdom of investor Warren Buffett: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." Are your customers at the top of your organizational chart in both word and deed? If not, what might you need to do differently?

### **Get Personal**

It's hard to love at a distance. Choice Hotels understands this. The company is presently running a campaign emphasizing the personal attention it gives to its guests. A recent headline states: "When he checked in, he was Mr. Simmons. When he checked out, he was just plain Bob." This kind of customer intimacy is a hallmark for lovemarks. For some hotels, these are just words; for others, they are a way of doing business.

Peet's Coffee & Tea recently ran a "Why I Love Peet's" contest to ask customers "to share their passion for Peet's." Peet's wanted to know what makes its brand special in the eyes of customers. How can you get more intimate with your customers this year? Do you dare ask them what makes your brand special?

### **Delight Is in the Details**

Lands' End is always looking for ways to go the extra mile. The company already won industry kudos and customers' hearts with the My Virtual Model feature, which enables a customer to see potential clothing purchases on his online "body." That's a big detail that Lands' End gets right in terms of honoring a customer's need for a succinct and engaging shopping experience. Lands' End also pays attention to the little details—like product copy. I like the "think-of-all-the-customers' concerns" copy approach Lands' End employs. For a pair of fleece pants, it gets right to the point with bulleted copy that quickly addresses what is top-of-mind for the potential buyer:

- NanoTex Resists Static permanent treatment does exactly what it claims: resists static (and fuzz, lint, pet hair and dust)
- Comfortable elastic waist and back MP3 player pocket

Or, how about Lands' End's Lost Mitten Club, where it "will replace any child's mitten in the same season as purchase at half the price of a pair with free shipping." Now that's customer love!

Brand love is a lasting commitment. This is no speed dating service. And it's not flowers and chocolates once a year on Valentine's Day. No, it's more like a devoted marriage where you work to meet your partner's needs and bring him or her joy each day. Love, passion, charisma and devotion: Make these part of your brand agenda. Your employees and customers will love you for it!

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