

Branding: Eight Ways to Keep Your Customers Coming Back



"Not all companies keep their word," says author and sales consultant Scott Deming, but the ones that do set themselves apart from the competition. Deming is also the opening keynote speaker for NSRA's upcoming conference, "Retail Makeover: In Tough Times, It's Time to Make Changes."

The marketplace is filled with savvy consumers wise to the latest trends, Deming believes. If there's a hot new product on the market, they won't miss it. So, figuring out how to keep a business fresh and top-of-mind is tougher than ever. Deming says sharp business owners do so by creating the ultimate customer experience to advance their brand.



Scott Deming

In his 2007 book, "The Brand Who Cried Wolf: Deliver on Your Company's Promise and Create Customers for Life" (available from John Wiley & Sons) Deming says it's essential to "keep your promise" to the customer, whether that promise is implied or stated outright. "The ones that do will naturally set themselves apart from the competition," he adds. "By providing the ultimate customer experience, you make people loyal to your brand. Brand loyalty is everything."

To develop that loyalty, Deming offers eight tips:

1. Be careful what you promise. If you don't deliver on your brand promises, you won't create loyalty. If you mess up with a customer once, he might give you another chance, but it's likely that the next time he needs something, he'll go to one of your competitors. In the reverse scenario, when a company delivers on its promises, the customer feels part of the company's family and culture.

2. Separate yourself from the pack. When businesses get mired in sales quotas, short-term goals and statistics, the people inside those businesses become robotic. You should actually be focused on exceeding your customers' expectations.

Start by getting rid of impersonal customer service techniques, such as email or automated telephone services. When it comes to customers, always be proactive.

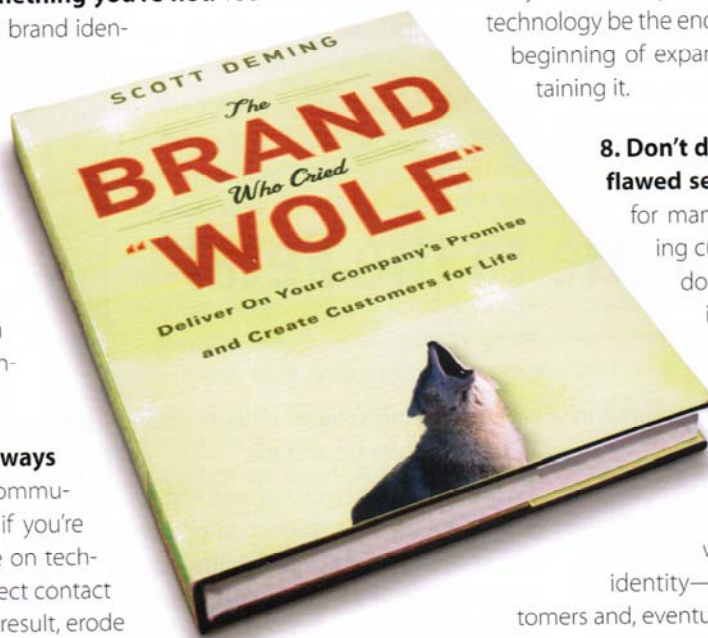
3. Perspective is everything. To really know how things are going at your company, you'll have to step out of your own shoes and take a walk in those of your customers and employees. You'll also need to gauge employee loyalty, because it's loyal employees who provide the ultimate experience for customers.

4. Face the fact that you are probably not as great as you think you are. You may or may not be aware of the "Lake Wobegon Effect," but it is a phenomenon from which many businesses suffer—a human tendency to think we are better than we actually are. It can be devastating in business. One reason is that when you think your business is the best, you don't work as hard to keep making it better. Focus on aspects of your brand that are not succeeding, and do everything you can to improve.

5. Understand your company's "reach of influence." Everyone in business is familiar with the adage that a happy customer tells one friend about a good experience while an unhappy customer tells ten friends about a bad experience. It's the customer experience ripple effect, and you want to ensure that your business creates only positive ripples. To do this, you need to focus on actions that show you understand your customers' needs.

6. Don't pretend to be something you're not. You are your brand. Everyone has a brand identity, but they don't all understand their own brand correctly. Branding is not a matter of putting on a persona that others will like. Be sincere about trying to understand your customers' needs, desires, and what they'd truly love from you. You'll make a genuine connection.

7. The easy way isn't always best. Technology has made communication so much easier. But if you're not careful, too much reliance on technology can take you out of direct contact with your customers and, as a result, erode your brand. Texting, emailing, and instant messaging do not allow you an opportunity to create emotional connections with your customers. Effective use of technology should help you streamline your operations, create new opportunities and rein-



force your carefully developed brand. Don't let technology be the end of your brand; let it be the beginning of expanding, extending, and sustaining it.

8. Don't drive your customers to a flawed service. A common mistake for many business owners is driving customers to a business that does not already have a brand identity in place that welcomes and encourages those customers. Appearance without substance—that is, advertising and driving people to your business, without a powerful brand identity—leads to unsatisfied customers and, eventually, business failure. ■

Scott Deming will address "Creating the Exceptional Customer Experience" during NSRA's February 11, 2009 conference at the Tuscany Suites & Casino in Las Vegas. To register, please visit www.nsra.org.

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 to you and yours
 from **NSRA**

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