

Do you know what your customer's experience is really like?

It's painfully obvious that in many companies, marketing is completely separate from customer service and on another planet from company operations. This is why we often see marketing communications that have nothing in common with the actual experience of using a product or service.

I have written about this several times before, but **as long as marketing is divorced from customer experience, companies will cultivate poor relationships with their customers.**

Recently, I stayed at a Holiday Inn Express. You know, where the marketing says that you will be smarter just by staying there. In reality, the walls were paper thin, making sleeping a challenge; the bathroom was cramped, making getting ready a challenge; and to top it off, I could smell breakfast cooking in my room, half-way down the hall on the second floor at 6:30 in the morning. Oh, and if this weren't enough, when I tried to work out in the fitness closet, I was greeted by an overheated room, with no temperature controls, and outdated, hard-to-use equipment. It didn't help that the front desk seem disinterested, and not once greeted me when I walked in the door.

I did not feel smarter by staying at the Holiday Inn. In fact, I felt taken. Their pricing for this location is on par with a hotel, not the motel they truly are.

While I was staying at this hotel I kept thinking that the hotel manager and the front desk people had never spent a night at their own motel. Or perhaps they had, which is why they were rarely to be seen and seemed so unenthusiastic about their jobs. What I know for certain is that whoever does the

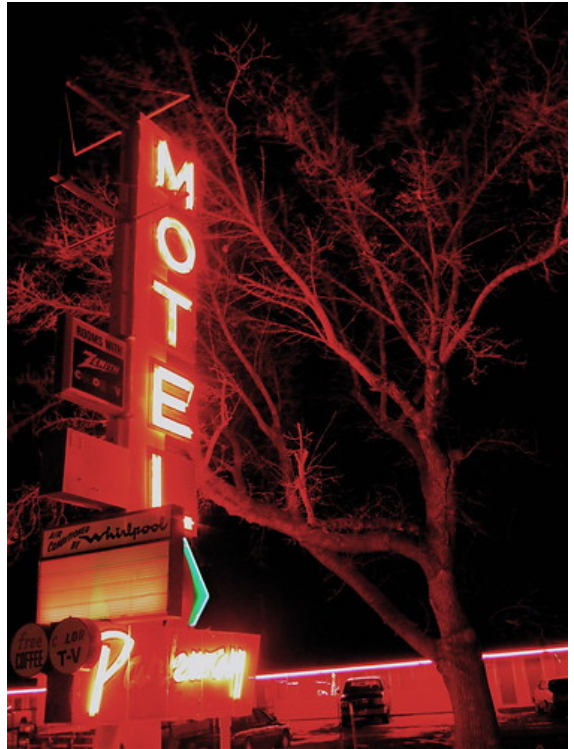
marketing for Holiday Inn Express wants you to believe that this place is tops. But, you will only believe it if you have a positive customer experience. **If you, like me, have a negative customer experience, not only will you scoff at the marketing, but you will likely become a vampire instead of brand ambassador. That is, you will take away customers rather than bring business.**

If you want to have marketing communications that work LONG TERM, then you must learn about your customer's experiences with your product or service. You want to know the unvarnished truth. **If the experience is consistently bad, you have to fix the experience, not the marketing.**

Ultimately, the most amazing communications/marketing campaign can't sell a bad product or service.

What your latest hotel stay can teach you about marketing

Have you stayed at a hotel recently? Did you enjoy your stay? If you didn't, what was it that you had issues with? Towels not fluffy enough? Housekeeping didn't clean properly? Or my pet peeve, too much noise? If you did enjoy your stay, what made it good? Helpful staff? Location? Great amenities?



Motel in Livingston , MT by
Beyond Neon on Flickr

Your experience with the hotel is what makes you like it or not. Not the advertising and probably not the rate you paid.

Last year, I stayed at a chain hotel where the price was right, but nothing else was. I could hear the alarm of the guy next door to me (and his TV and everything else). The coffee in the “free” breakfast was terrible. When I complained and asked for a different room, they did accommodate me. But the problem wasn’t the room itself, it was the hotel’s cheap construction. I will never stay there again. On the other hand, over New Year’s I stayed at a boutique hotel. There were only a few rooms per floor. The building was old and solidly built. Plus, it was in a great location, quiet and comfortable. I would go back.

Marketing can get you to book a stay, but you won’t be coming back if you had a bad experience. And in this social media age, you most likely will share your experiences on a rating site like Trip Advisor or Yelp. If you have questions or concerns, you may go on Twitter or Facebook.

Marketing is important, but so is the customer experience. You can't succeed in business if you don't work on both. Too many companies spend extraordinary amounts of money trying to get you to buy something, but then don't expend any effort once you've made your purchase.

With service products, like hotel stays and air travel, experience matters even more because there is no tangible item that you have bought. All you will be taking home are the memories of the experience. The flight went smoothly and you got to your destination on time? That is either a good memory or something that you don't think about again. But if you got to your hotel and there were dirty linens on the bed and a non-functioning air conditioning unit, not only is that a bad experience, you will remember it.