Expectations

We all have gone to see a movie that our best friend raved about only to find we thought it was just OK. Same happens with restaurants that receive glowing reviews. What happens is that our expectations have been set too high and naturally, we are disappointed with reality.

It’s a like a present that is wrapped beautifully….what will be inside? Will it be better than its wrapping?

Buzz is about forming expectations and then exploiting them. Marketing people love buzz or WOM (word-of-mouth) because few things are as powerful as a recommendation from someone we know.

The down side of creating high expectations is having to deliver or even over-deliver on such expectations. We can have stuff go very wrong when things don’t live up to expectations.

Lately, I have been paying attention to hotel websites and ratings. Usually, there is a picture of a perfect room. We don’t see anything wrong. But what happens if we book this room, and show up at the hotel only to find that the bathroom is filthy, the carpets (which did not show up in the room picture) are grimy and the noise level is unbearable. What happens is that we are very unhappy. But what makes it worse is that we *expected* better.

Clearly there is a fine line to walk for marketing people. We have to create expectations and we have to be able to meet them in a reasonable way.

Tastes differ of course, so what I absolutely love, you may hate. Humans are more forgiving of taste not being met, but with service and other issues that are quantifiable we are not so forgiving. For instance, I went to a restaurant with a

friend. We both order the same thing, and I like it but she doesn’t. Taste is at play (she prefers less spicy). However, we can both agree on the service (good), ambience (lovely), parking (difficult).

Marketing that succeeds creates high enough expectations to attract a customer without creating a situation that the customer may actually be upset. The latter happens a lot with sales. Stores run a sale, drawing customers expecting to get a great price on an item they really want. Expectations are not met and tempers are raised if the item is out of stock or is not as it appeared.

What do you do to create reasonable expectations? How do you navigate this line?