

Are you keeping your promises?

This past weekend I stayed in a hotel in Rochester, NY. The hotel's website is nice, modern (although it has music) and tells me they have refurbished their rooms. In a tourist magazine that I picked up at the airport, the hotel has an ad that tells me that hot breakfast is included in the price. The website says only they offer "complimentary breakfast."

The hotel does not offer a hot breakfast. It offers what is better known as a "continental breakfast." That is, a selection of muffins and breakfast pastries, cold cereals, fruit and yogurt. They also provide a microwave where you can reheat a Jimmy Dean breakfast muffin or heat up your instant oatmeal. Nothing wrong with the complimentary breakfast but it is not a hot breakfast. Hot breakfast means eggs, waffles, pancakes and other cooked items. None of those were offered.

As for refurbishing—I think this means the hotel added new linens and flat screen tvs. The bathrooms seemed dated and nothing seemed particularly modern (certainly not the alarm clocks or the phones). The room had a safe (not something you see very often in a hotel). In fact, the hotel highlights the safe as a room feature, not mentioning anywhere that they charge guests \$1 per day just to have the safe, regardless of whether it is used or not.

In short, this hotel, while not bad, did not live up to its promises made on its website or in its advertising. It also failed to mention that something that they include in your hotel room is actually fee-based.

In this case, these lapses are not disastrous for the hotel. However, generally, saying something in your marketing that is simply not true in "real life," will result in broken trust

and lost customers. And yet, how many times have you seen ads that are inaccurate? Promises that start with free or assurance of 100s of satisfied customers. Marketers sometimes play hard and fast with these formulas, but if your product or service is not able to back it up, you are going to turn off your potential customers. It is that simple.

Live up to your marketing promises, and be transparent. Don't hit up customers with fees for services you seem to imply are included. Don't promise things you can't or won't deliver. Customers will resent these things and will be cautious in choosing to do business with you again.

