

Opinions

Positioning to win with a powerful brand story

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A unique and compelling brand story creates alignment within your organization. When your brand story is fully embraced, both customers and employees become more engaged with, and more loyal to, your brand.



By Karen McSteen

Trader Joe's isn't a grocery store—it is a place to set sail on an adventure.

Each aisle offers a treasure trove of epicurean delights at everyday prices. Whether it's organic sweet potatoes, heirloom popcorn or French fromage, Trader Joe's has "food innovators" who travel the world looking for the best products. They then work with third parties to manufacture those products and license them under the Trader Joe's brand, which enables them to pass along significant savings and value to their customers. "Captains" (store managers) and "Crew Members" (employees) are on deck to assist customers as they embark upon their shopping quest.

A strong story is the currency that keeps a brand alive in people's minds and hearts

Even if you've never stepped foot into a Trader Joe's, it's easy to "get" their brand. Why? Because they have a powerful brand story. We are moved by powerful stories. They make the brand experience come to life in consumers' minds and they create a strong emotional attachment between the brand and its customers.

Remarkable stories are not created overnight. It's all about positioning your brand, which is a long-term business-building proposition that should be deeply embedded into your organization. It is the critical strategic lens through which all important decisions about the brand should be viewed including capital investment priorities, environmental design, service culture, brand identity, strategic partnerships and more.

All these elements working together creates a central focus and it is critical that everyone in the organization embraces the story and understands their part in delivering it. Once this happens, your brand will be defined by this story and it will be clear the value you bring customers and the unique experience they will enjoy when using your brand.

Another great example of a brand with a powerful story is [Graduate Hotels](#). These hotels are nestled in university towns across the United States. Through locally inspired design, team memorabilia and a clever brand voice—such as referring to their dining options as "meal plans" and event venues as "memory making get-togethers, you'll actually remember this time around"—guests ("students") enjoy experiences that inform and delight. You can feel the story in their messaging and, importantly, you feel it the moment you walk in the door. It's a truly unique experience that brings back the youthful optimism of a visitor's college days.

Standing out in a crowded marketplace

Now more than ever, having a clear and compelling story is critical for your hotel brand. With the plethora of information coming at people every day along with shrinking attention spans, breaking through the noise is hard. When people look for products and services online, most searches yield thousands of results. Furthermore, the rise of voice-assisted devices such as Alexa and Siri has led people to do less searching for the sake of efficiency and simplicity. The world of "one-shot answers," as British artificial intelligence entrepreneur William Tunstall-Pedoe calls them, is not far off.

And as more consumers adopt these devices and do less visual searching and comparing, having a clear and consistent brand story and experience will be essential. Rather than hoping to be the one-off answer when someone asks Alexa for a good hotel recommendation in Nashville, Tennessee, you want them to ask Alexa for your hotel in Nashville.

Think back to Trader Joe's. A traveler in a new town may ask Siri for Trader Joe's rather than "find me a grocery store" because they are compelled by the story and their experience with the brand.

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How to create your brand positioning and tell your story

Be clear about who you are targeting. This requires digging deep to learn everything you can about existing customers' and potential customers' unmet needs and desires.

Gain a keen understanding of the competitive marketplace, trends and even businesses outside of your category. Find the open market space, or even break traditional category paradigms.

Identify what only your brand can do to solve your target customers' pain points and address a need that competitors are not solving for. This creates a strong emotional reason for people to choose your brand—this is your brand promise.

Once your promise is clear, it needs to be brought to life in distinctive ways within the experience. These are the proof points you must consistently deliver.

To write your story, use vivid language to describe your customer and the unique promise your brand is making to the them. Make clear the experience you will deliver and the values you will live by. Demonstrate how customers will be better off as a result of choosing your brand.

Keep in mind, the audience for your brand story first and foremost is inside your organization – your leadership and your employees. Defining your unique position in the market and creating an authentic, heartfelt, genuine story to describe your brand is about embracing and delivering a meaningful experience to customers in a way that truly reflects your culture and values. When the story is fully embraced, this experience will increase employee and customer engagement, ensuring your brand is strong well into the future.

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