

## Opinions

# The power of operations in building a strong brand

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Your brand's success is dependent upon consistently delivering on the promise you make to customers.



By Karen McSteen

When people hear the word “brand,” they often think of a logo, a tagline or an advertising campaign. While a great logo or campaign can be eye-catching or intriguing—maybe even enough to convert a customer—it is the experience a customer has with your brand that builds long-term loyalty.

According to PwC's 2018 Future of Customer Experience Survey, “one in three consumers (32%) say they will walk away from a brand they love after just one bad experience.”

Not long ago, if a customer had a less than ideal experience with your hotel, they might give your property a low rating on your company survey, file a complaint or mention their experience to friends. Now, the world hears about a bad experience in real time. With an infinite number of choices, today's consumers are doing their own homework and online reviews are a powerful force. In 2017, Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center found that nearly 95% of shoppers read online reviews about others' experiences before making a purchase.

Thus, the long-term success of your brand is directly in the hands of your team members who check in guests, clean your guestrooms, prepare and serve food in your restaurants, and so forth. Given this new normal in which a bad experience (or even a small misstep) can immediately affect your brand exponentially, it is critical to clearly define what your brand stands for and ensure everyone in the organization understands the unique role they play in delivering your brand's promise.

Developing your brand promise begins with understanding the customer you are serving and gaining insight into their unmet needs, wants and desires and then defining how your brand can uniquely address these needs. However, stating your promise is not enough.

You can't build a deep emotional connection with guests and high levels of customer engagement unless there are credible reasons to believe your promise. These reasons to believe come from defining your brand values and the experience your team members deliver. This means every service and product touchpoint within the experience needs to be carefully crafted through the lens of your brand promise, considering each step of the customer journey holistically and the critical handoffs from one team member to another. The best service experiences are a direct reflection of your brand values and frictionless for your guests.

### What operations leaders can do

Here are six important considerations for operations leaders when it comes to delivering your brand promise.

- 1. Create a blueprint for activating the brand promise:** Use the blueprint as a way to document the experience to be created at each touch point. This will help team members to understand their role in delivering the promise.
- 2. Invest in the processes, tools and training required to deliver the brand promise:** Team members can only deliver the brand promise if they have the skills and resources to do what is expected.
- 3. Instill a brand-centric approach from day one:** Include in the onboarding process of new team members an explanation of what the brand is all about—provide insight into the customers that seek out your brand; the unique needs that your brand fulfills; and what is expected of each and every team member... not just the how they should do things, but why.
- 4. Reinforce the brand promise daily through communication and celebration:** Many hotels have a stand up meeting at the start of each shift. As part of the agenda, consider focusing on a specific brand value or sharing a customer review that highlights an important element of the brand experience. Design



team member incentives and recognition programs to support delivery of the brand promise.

**5. Encourage real-time customer feedback:** Instead of asking “how is your stay so far,” which most likely elicits a “good” or “fine,” encourage team members to ask, “what are you enjoying most about your stay so far?” The answer, either positive or negative, will be more descriptive. If you hear about a problem in real time, there is a better chance you can turn around the customer experience and their overall impression of the brand before they leave.

**6. Be true to your brand values:** The decisions leaders make, the actions taken—such as who you hire, how you treat employees, how you schedule, what gets prioritized in the budget—speak volumes about what the brand represents. Build a habit around using your brand promise as the filter for decision making.

Hospitality is unique because at its core, it is human-centric. Even in today’s technology-obsessed society, a good human-to-human experience is rare and special—creating a deep emotional connection.

Great service in support of your brand promise stands out and is what makes the brand meaningful to your customers. Delivering consistent, superlative experiences will help yield positive reviews, which in turn can promote the brand in ways more powerful than any advertising or marketing. This can only happen with a strong operational backbone.

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