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CUSTOMER SERVICE + BRANDING = ADDED VALUE!

**IS YOUR CONTACT CENTER REINFORCING
OR DEGRADING YOUR COMPANY’S BRAND?**

By Martha Brooke, Interaction Metrics

CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE

SMART INSIGHTS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR THE CONTACT CENTER
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RUNNING A CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER, EVEN WHEN OUTSOURCED, IS EXPENSIVE. That's why, for years, executives have been touting the idea that customer service needs to find ways to offset its costs. Usually that means cross-selling and upselling, which when done smoothly is great, but often it is simply aggravating for associates and annoying for customers. What if customer service could add value in a new, better way?

Branded customer service does just that. It adds value to each customer interaction by reinforcing and demonstrating the qualities that make your company unique. It reminds customers why you're special, shows that you care enough about your brand to align it with your actions, and makes an impression that is vastly more powerful than any TV ad, web banner or promotional piece could ever be.

WHAT IS BRANDING—AND WHAT CAN CUSTOMER SERVICE DO?

A COMPANY'S BRAND IS NOT ITS SLOGAN. It is a feeling, often a set of values—it's the essential kernel that makes a company memorable and sets it apart. Brand is often summarized as a company's promise to its customers.

"It's not a slogan" bears repeating, because all too often customer service branding is seen as asking associates to parrot company catchphrases. But ending a call or email with "Thank you for contacting Company X, your home for the best gizmos in the world" doesn't add value for anyone. It comes off as scripted and insincere.

Instead, branded customer service brings a company's core values to life by demonstrating them through each customer service interaction. Here's a definition:

Branded customer service is the practice of proactively communicating the unique aspects of a company through well-defined behaviors, adapted for the customer and their situation.

"The unique aspects of a company" are the core values that differentiate a company and give it an identity. "Well-defined behaviors" are branded content, phrases and resources that associates can use in specific customer interactions. Adapting is key, because it's what transforms your brand from an abstract, one-size-fits-all concept into a meaningful way to connect with each customer.

Here's an example: COMPANY GOURMET specializes in premium mail-order food and gift baskets, which are particularly popular as client gifts for the holidays. The marketing team spends millions on advertising their brand, which is: family owned, high quality, fresh, hand-picked produce and top-notch presentation.

In our customer service evaluation, we heard a phone call between an associate and a customer who was calling with a question about a gift basket. Here's how seven seconds of that call went:

Customer: "Will the apples be ready to eat?"

Associate: "Usually not. It may take several days for them to ripen. We keep them in cold storage for a few months..."



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That answer is technically “correct,” but it doesn’t distinguish the brand. The apples being kept “in cold storage for a few months” sounds like a chain grocery store, not a premium-quality food company.

Here’s our branded content rewrite:

Customer: *“Will the apples be ready to eat?”*

Associate: *“Almost! To ensure that they arrive in perfect shape, we send them as they’re ripening. In just a few days, they’ll be mouth-watering and delicious.”*

The new branded content communicates the company’s commitment to providing a premium experience. “Almost!” introduces the idea of anticipating a gift. “To ensure that they arrive in perfect shape” shows they care about top-notch presentation. “Mouthwatering and delicious” communicates the fresh, high-quality aspects of the brand that COMPANY GOURMET has spent so much time and money to create.

And that’s exactly the point—when you’ve spent time and money to define your brand, customer service interactions should support your brand, not degrade it.

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE

SOMETIMES IT’S HARD TO GET EXECUTIVES AND MARKETING DIRECTORS TO BUY INTO A CUSTOMER SERVICE BRANDING PLAN. We’ve discussed how branding customer service adds value by reinforcing the company’s message, but from the marketing team’s perspective, there’s a storm of forces that makes investing in branded customer service worthwhile:

1 **IT IS INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION**
While companies spend millions on search engine marketing, display ads, tweets and more, customers are increasingly able to skip commercials, turn off ads and tune companies out. That’s why each customer impression counts more than ever before.

It’s the job of advertising to make impressions and build awareness. But what’s often missed is that contact center interactions are the most powerful way to build impressions of a brand. That’s why marketing teams need to take an interest in how their brand messages are (or aren’t) being communicated through every interaction.

TAKEAWAY: *Failing to brand customer service squanders valuable customer impressions.*



2 **CUSTOMERS ARE SKEPTICAL**
Modern customers don’t trust a logo and a catchphrase, and with Facebook, Yelp and Twitter at the ready, they’re quick to point out when companies fail to meet their expectations. That’s why the best companies demonstrate who they are through every interaction.
When customers reach out to a contact center, few things are more off-putting than a customer service experience that contradicts what a company says about itself.

For example, take Comcast. When the recording of a customer repeatedly trying to terminate his cable service went viral, it showed just how quickly customer service can degrade the brand.

The people behind HonestSlogans.com even came up with a scathing new catchphrase for them: “Comcast: just try leaving us...” No company wants that kind of attention.

Think of it another way: Are you more affected by a car rental’s company slogan or by placing a call to get a billing issue resolved? If a car rental’s slogan is, “We Try Harder,” then unless customer service “tries harder,” customers will notice—and may even remark on the hypocrisy.

TAKEAWAY: Customer service that doesn’t support advertised messaging radically undermines a company’s branding efforts.

3 MARKET TURMOIL MAKES DEMONSTRATING UNIQUENESS CRUCIAL

Customers have countless options for where to purchase their goods and services, which means the competition is stiffer than before—and more global. Plus, social media enables customers to constantly compare brands to the marketplace. This makes differentiation crucial.

Customer service provides a unique opportunity to cut through the clutter. Rather than just telling customers your company is unique, customer service can demonstrate that uniqueness through branded content. Customer service branded content is authentic and therefore believable and because it’s believable it’s memorable for customers.

TAKEAWAY: Use customer service to show what makes you special.

ENSURING THAT YOU ARE BRANDED

BRANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE IS AN INTENSIVE PROCESS. You’ve got to identify the core values of your brand, determine what they mean, and use those values to develop branded content for your associates.



There are a few great introductions to branding customer service, but they all omit a key piece of the puzzle: To ensure that your branding plan is working, you must accurately and objectively measure how you’re doing.

To ensure that you’re branded, you need nuanced measurement that captures the degree to which associates actually adhere to your branding guidelines. It’s something that computerized monitoring can’t do, because each interaction is a complex mix of touchpoint, customer and situation. The appropriate branded content for a curious prospect is not the same branded content that’s right for an angry customer trying to make a return.

EACH CUSTOMER IMPRESSION
COUNTS MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.



Here are a few pointers for accurate measurement when it comes to customer service branding:

- Interactions must be randomly sampled in sufficient quantities for a low error rate and high confidence level.
- The expectations for branded content should be weighted for different touchpoints and varying customers to reflect what's most and least important for particular scenarios.
- Scoring rules must be extremely specific so that you're measuring how well associates demonstrate the brand. (You'll know the rules are precise when multiple scorers get the same result.)



Without measurement, it will be impossible to know the degree to which your team is carrying out the branding plan—and you won't be able to incentivize associates for their branding efforts. And, just like your accounting statements or anything else, for your measurement to be taken seriously by an executive board, you'll need to use an independent, third-party auditor.



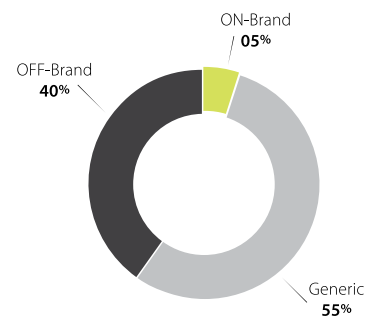
Branded customer service is the superior way for contact centers to add value to companies. It's also the most effective way for the brand message to reach customers. A company's brand is its promise to the customer. The effort of customer service branding will be rewarded—but only when you prove quantitatively that your service fulfills that promise with each and every customer interaction. 🎯

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INTERACTION METRICS' customer experiences audits are the most accurate, nuanced way to show how your customer service experience rates. We even deliver an Interaction Brand Score, which shows the percent of your interactions that are ON and OFF-Brand.

Your Interaction Metrics Brand Score tracks the degree to which your customer service *actually* supports your brand promise.



INTERACTION BRAND SCORE
Percent of your interactions that are ON and OFF-Brand

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