

To Stay on the Map, Put Your Customers There First

Understand your customers' journeys and you'll understand how to build your brand.

I've loved maps since I was a kid. Forget GPS and other technology. As fodder for imagined journeys there is nothing better than a map. Visually tracing possible routes, stopping on places with intriguing names, conjuring up the experience of being there.

Once you take the actual journeys, however, reality takes over. While you discover that some places are just as hoped and some much better, you come to find that other places are sadly disappointing, for any number of reasons.

Whatever the outcome, all journeys are learning experiences. More than this, all of those stops you make along the journey somehow "morph"

together and take on a life and a personality of their own in your mind. You talk about "the trip" in a holistic sense, as a synergy of memorable encounters, sights and expressions that gain resonance over time.

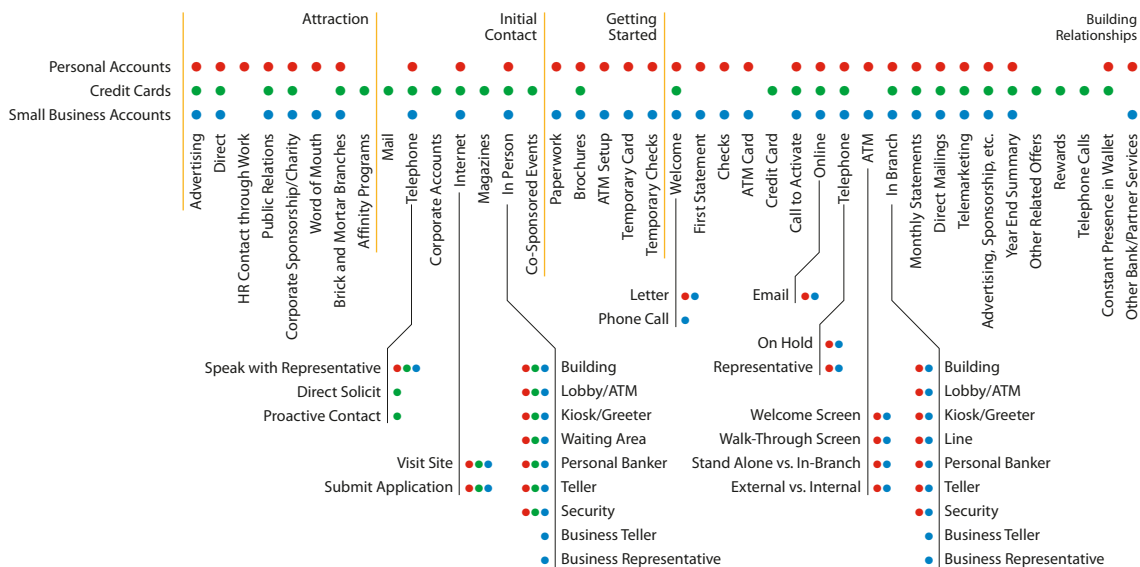
As I've watched what's been happening across the landscape of branding of late, I've come to the realization that customers are having the same experience. We've come to a point where a brand is, in fact, comprised of stops along a journey. Call it the customer journey, if you will.

Customers are interacting with brands at a myriad of touch points; these points in succession transform into "the brand" with its inherent associative personality and meaning. No longer provided the whole brand story in a controlled setting – sitting on the couch and absorbing it as was once the case – customers are

picking up pieces of the brand story along their own sequential route.

From awareness tactics to information gathering processes, from service components to loyalty and retention activities, customers are exposed to multiple brand touch points. Made up of proliferating media, technology and cultural channels, these touch points come in all sizes and dimensions, cyber included.

Some are experiential in nature: how the product design feels in their hand; interactions with customer service; the Internet; the retail experience, wherein the customer actively takes part. Some are outward expressions of the brand's identity, such as advertising, PR, logos and product placement, for which customers are passive recipients.



Landor Customer Journey™
Map Prototype for a Retail
Financial Services Journey



What's becoming increasingly apparent is that only some of these touch points are delivered by the marketing department. The boundaries between brand-building channels are quickly blurring. What this means is that the job of brand building today belongs to the entire organization.

The challenge is to make sense of the customer journey – to demystify it – for both the customer and the organization. Which brings me back to those maps.

My premise is that successfully building and managing a brand today requires a map: a map of the customer's journey with the brand. Not merely a map of imagined routes, but a map that reflects the reality of the customer's journey. A map drawn, in fact, from the customer's point of view.

First it's necessary to take the journey in their shoes, in order to become aware of exactly how many potential touch points there are. (Take a look at the prototype retail financial services journey and you'll see what I mean.)

And, second, to understand what's actually happening at each of these brand touch points – whether online, on the phone, at check-in, in-flight, or wherever it may be – means to understand the overall brand experience.

A map of your customer's journey is one of the simplest, yet most powerful, tools in the brand building process. At a glance, you can see

from an organizational perspective where the brand touches the customer, where it makes sense to invest in a branded experience, and where it doesn't.

A map that is inclusive of all touch points and organizational implications enables a clear overview of how the customer's journey hangs together – or doesn't – and identifies what role each of the brand's business units should play in shaping the customer's experience of the brand. Given the multiple stops, it identifies how and where the organization should be bringing the brand's difference to life in a way that aligns with both brand positioning and customer insights.

A map can help the organization understand where the brand touches the customer, where it matters and where it doesn't by both customer, and by segment. In an instant it can focus the organization – as one – on the needs and requirements of the customer illustrating how each touch point links back to the core brand idea and affects other touch points, or doesn't.

Most importantly, a map of the customer journey establishes, from an overall organizational perspective, where it makes sense to invest in brand-supporting activities and where it does not. Be it an upgraded reservation system, enhanced training materials, renovated retail spaces, or a more distinct advertising campaign. Bottom line, it allows you to see where it's worth spending

your money, investing in a branded experience – to ROI your touch points, as it were.

When the entire organization can see the customer's journey as the sum of the brand, it breaks down functional silos, fosters communication and, in the end, allows the delivery of a better, more cohesive branded experience.

With resources being what they are, prudent brand management can no longer assume rubber-stamping every customer interaction in exactly the same way. But rather, it means allocating resources effectively and efficiently in order to make the customer experience and the organizational experience the positive learning experiences they should be.

A well-drawn map of the customer journey will take you down a road where all stops along the way are just as hoped, possibly better than expected – with none sadly disappointing. For a brand to stay on the map, it's critical to put your customer there first. By understanding your customer's journey – the real, not the imagined – you'll discover a lot about how and where to build your brand. ■

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