

Brand owners won't get their hands dirty

By [Terry Behan](#)

27 Jun 2006

The bottom line is this - brand owners don't want to get their hands dirty. Managing the brand experience beyond the costly advertising remains largely undefined, ill managed and poorly controlled. And in my experience, there are very few companies that get it right.



This year's *AdFocus* publication revealed that South Africa's top 100 advertisers spent in excess of R6.5 billion on positioning and building their brands in 2005. Moreover, some individual companies spent upwards of R200 million on compelling advertising to drive their brands into the hearts and minds of their target markets. This in turn leaves the marketer hoping for prolific sales so this significant investment pays dividends.

I hate to burst that bubble, but unless there is complete alignment between what's advertised and what is delivered, the advertising spend is a waste of money. If the brand experience does not measure up to the advertised expectation, Mr Joe Public is guaranteed to walk away. This is one of the great tragedies of brand communication efforts.

Legendary management consultant Peter Drucker says, "The purpose of business is not to make a sale, but to make and keep a customer." In many cases the advertising does the selling, but other engagements with the brand often conspire to "un-sell" the customer.

In the words of former chairman and CEO of Nestlé, Timm F Crull, "Long-term brand equity and growth depends on our ability to successfully integrate and implement all elements of a comprehensive marketing program." And Nestlé should know: it spends more on brand building and advertising than the GDP of some of our smaller African neighbours.

Pays to be consistent

If nothing else, defining and managing the customers' brand experience beyond the point of first engagement should be seen as a risk management tool. A case in point is the recent survey done at South African airports which revealed that for every visitor that comes to our country and has a good experience, three more people are likely to come. But for every visitor that comes to our country and has a bad experience, 10 more people are likely not to come. It pays to deliver a consistent brand experience that measures up to promises made in the market place."

Sadly, bigger is not better. Large companies suffer brand misalignment more than smaller companies. It seems the size of the business is inversely proportional to its ability to align all of its brand touch points in a holistic manner. The result is a fragmented customer engaging experience.

A client we recently worked with, which could be described as a large company, shared a startling fact with us. Eighty percent of its customer-interfacing staff doesn't like customers. Ouch, that's got to hurt.

Horror stories

Organisational processes and the people that manage them regularly disrupt the consistency that brands need to be effective. Horror stories abound in the corridors of ad agencies and clients: "Did you hear the one about the product that wasn't available in-store when a huge advertising campaign launched it?"

The good news is that companies that get this integration right, those that have successfully mapped all the contact points of their brands and are managing them appropriately, can and will beat the competition hands down.

Stelios Haji-loannou, chairman of EasyJet, the very successful European low cost airline, reckons, "Your brand is created out of customer contact and the experience your customers have of you." Stelios (as he prefers to be called) has grown a multibillion dollar empire on this premise.

For those brand custodians who are not getting it right and want to remedy the situation, it's simple in concept, but requires enormous amounts of hard work (don't let the sweet talking consultants fool you). At the most senior level of the business brand integration needs to be a priority. Most importantly, there needs to be consequences for non-compliance. After all, if senior executives can't get it right, how do they expect their brands to survive?

ABOUT TERRY BEHAN

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