

# MOMENTS OF TRUTH

**How do you make the very most of the key moments of interaction with customers?**

Heightened experience at these Moments of Truth makes the difference. When researching the ways that the world's best companies get really close to their customers to earn their loyalty, I found that one of the tricks they seem to have learned is the art of theatre. Of course, theatre takes many forms, from the tragedies of Aeschilus and the beauty of Mozart's Magic Flute to the farce of Mr Bean, not to mention a host of other traditions and moods. At each and every moment of interaction with the customer the brand is on show, performing, communicating, hopefully enthralling, whether it's an ad, letter, web site, personal contact or even product design. At these moments it needs to respond to the situational imperative of the customer while adding its own unique magic.

For I think every act of the brand is a message to customers. Every moment of truth is a point of interaction when the customer judges you. This total body language of your brand is therefore how consumers come to know you.

Here's a small showcase of the art of one-to-one theatre, with some of the insights learned.

**1 Talking dull is almost as bad as talking dirty**

IBM's launch of its DB2 operating system (picture 4) avoided a classic mistake, sounding like a robot or the office fax machine. So often, sellers talk dull, which is almost as bad as talking dirty. DB2 is a highly technical product for the computing community and IBM's competitors, assuming customer familiarity, were using technobabble. Research showed how confused and bored customers were, so any such material already

on the drawing board went out and a new creative language was found to communicate, across all media, how DB2 manages every kind of data from text to video to sound.

Lufthansa found a way to get through to a key community of senior people in the fashion industry. Following Goethe's advice, "Be bold and the universe will flow to you" their mail pack took the form of a tailored wing collar shirt (picture 5). The Lufthansa label was stitched in and a reply device slipped into the pocket. Five contracts worth around \$1 million each followed. Creative acquisition messages instantly establish an altogether different social bond compared with the tired formula of a discount.

Creativity can also help to generate PR, helping to surround the customer with the 360° brand experience. And of course, cus-

tomers love a relationship with a brand the world loves.

Schwab, a leading German mail order business, had a prize-winning campaign that had the media buzzing. One ad offered: "All families with 12 or more children receive this washing machine free. All others get it for just 899 DM." Other unusual groups got similar offers.

**2 Each moment of truth has its own mood**

The essence of one-to-one loyalty building is timing and tuning communication to suit or build that mood, a principle Britain's Royal Mail is expert at applying.

Parties are times for fun and booze. So, for Royal Mail's launch of their Freepost Name service (which lets the customer put just FREEPOST and the brand name on a reply) the medium was beer

mats! Individually tailored of course! The trigger for the occasion was a pub party at which many leading British Creative Directors would be present. Each mat lightly heartedly insulted one of them, saying that their ads were not memorable enough (because they omitted to offer the FREEPOST service).

Partnering can be a good way to create special moods or receptivity. When Walt Disney World and American Express partnered in 1994 to establish White Glove Treatment, they created a very special series of benefits and treatments for the American Express community (picture 3). Many of these families could be worth \$25,000 over ten years. Disney's 25th anniversary was the trigger for a magic Moment of Truth for Disney lovers to remember.

In quite another mood, Procrit, a drug to help cancer sufferers recover from chemotherapy, inter-

cepts worried new patients at a critical Moment of Truth. The trigger is the news that you've been diagnosed with cancer, followed by going online to the web to see what you can find. A Procrit banner responds to the search and takes you to an informational site from which you can hop to the Procrit home page to find out how to make the process less unpleasant.

**3 Honouring the customer's own time and preferences sometimes reveals unexpected moments for rich communication**

Belcolor, a Swiss photo-processing company, found an unusual medium. Recognising the special mood and timeliness of the holiday-maker's journey home, the usual airline back-of-seat sick bag was converted into a Belcolor envelope! Passengers could just slip their film into the envelope-bag and it was ready to post!



1



2



3



4



5

I think smart marketers have got past thinking of loyalty as cards and direct marketing as mail. Eatons, a Canadian retailer, warms the emotional bonds that trigger loyalty by providing Club members with a warm lounge and hot drink in each store, unbelievably useful in the freezing Canadian winter. This seems to meet the criteria for good one-to-one communication: that it should be accessible, truthful, individualised and involving.

**4 Bonds are a strategic way to think about offers. Get it right, and your service seems to sell itself**

There are few more experienced direct marketers than American Express. What they don't know about offers could probably be written on a very small postage stamp. But now they're also developing the new art of bonds. Gold Card for Frequent Business Travellers is such an example. Statistical study and research showed a special group of frequent business travellers who would probably appreciate a special tailoring of the service.

A new service package, such as cards for personal assistants and family, travel service and insurance benefits was carefully designed. The approach to the prospect community was relaxed and welcoming, as if the service might have existed for some time and was remarkably successful. Why? Hype was not needed because the design and contact was relevant and right. Each and every experience of the upgraded service now has the effect of strengthening the emotional ties.

**5 It's easy to be relevant when you know who you're talking to**

British Telecom have demonstrated some marvellous examples of the value of recognising the unique characteristics of the community or individual that you are communicating with. One programme involved sending out a questionnaire and responding to each of the very large percentage of respondees with a completely personalised set of offers, gaining a near 100% conversion.

And their lifestage ads got straight to the heart of the reader's situation, as the one below for pregnant mothers demonstrates (picture 6).

**6 Showing appreciation tangibly can richly reward both parties**

Air France recognise that past experiences of the brand create the gestalt that filters all future experience. Building on this marketing wisdom, they try to show signs of appreciation to frequent flyers with unconditional gifts that create positive experiences. For example, a small white box might appear with a video copy of Cocteau's masterpiece *la Belle et la Bête* timed to coincide with the premier of Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast*. Not only do such gifts help to make the relationship tangible, they help to bring Air France to front of mind on the next international flight. A small price.

**7 Trivial offers, discounts and gimmicks don't develop enduring relationships**

Microsoft recognised that one of the big moments of truth is initial evaluation of a new product, and especially the big decision whether to try at all. This moment shapes the future of the relationship. A mailing to IT managers worked better by being simple, while having fun at the expense of the trivial norm. Dismissing free mouse mats and pens (that they actually provided), the pack straightforwardly asked the managers to evaluate Windows NT on its merits, making the process very easy, another aid to relationships (picture 9).

**8 What do you do when things go wrong?**

While we all know that consistency and completeness of the brand experience creates loyalty,

and so try to ensure that each and every moment of truth is brand-true and worthy, in the immortal words of *Forrest Gump*, *Shit happens*.

Air France demonstrated with their *Frequence Plus* customers the six steps that manage such a crisis, keep friends and even build strong *Social Bonds* (picture 1). A strike had delayed cabin renovations (as well as damaging schedules). Customers were paying for upgrades they were simply not getting.

Air France took the first involving step when they acted promptly and proactively to break the silence with a letter from the CEO, apologising and explaining what had happened as well as their future plans. Then they made a call to each customer responding sympathetically to the inconvenience offering individual, symbolic atonement like air miles, upgrades or free tickets.

**9 The closer you are to customers, the more important your front line people**

Schwab wanted to become the most service-oriented mail order company. Recognising the importance of their people, the most important element of the communication mix, they commissioned an all day festive conference at the city hall. 1500 staff enjoyed the event designed and directed by OgilvyOne. Actors demonstrated the new service and performed critical moments of truth. Not only was this a demonstration of the principle of theatre mentioned above, this time with employees, it also highlights two more things great companies do.

They provide inspirational experience and support to staff. An e-mail announcement can't do this. So, not every important moment of truth happens with customers.

