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Expectations. Value Added. The "Experience."

By Carolyn West Price

If you're wondering the relationship among these words, it's simple. These are three aspects of the relationship your customer has with your company which you can control to ensure that switching to your competition just wouldn't be worth it...even if they are more aggressively marketing and charging lower prices.



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Think about it. If you establish appropriate expectations when you are courting a customer or client, there will be no disappointment...assuming you deliver what you promise as you promise it. For instance, think about the expectation you have when you go to a restaurant at lunch and their table tent promises that certain meals can be served in 15 minutes so you can be assured of being in and out in a timely manner. Well, what if that meal was served in 10 minutes? or what if it was served in 25? All other factors being equal (quality of the meal and serv-

ice), you would be thrilled in the first case and disappointed in the other one. Had they not promised anything, you may or may not have had an emotional response.

So, the moral to this story is simple: don't promise anything you can't consistently deliver.

Now, think about the next concept--value added.

Look at your product or service and simply think about ways in which you can enhance what you provide. Is it creating a "client conference report," which summarizes your meetings or phone conferences? Such a simple summary of your notes tells the client how thorough you are and how concerned you are that you both stay on the same page (in terms of your agreements from the specific conversation or meeting.)

Or, maybe it's a follow-up call after the delivery of a service or product. When was the last time someone performed a service at your home or office, which ended with a "check-up" phone call to see if you were pleased? These don't happen often, but surely stand out when they do. Yet, for the pennies per customer it will cost to implement such a "we appreciate you" program, isn't it worth it?

And, last, but not least, the "experience." I've certainly written on this topic before, but it warrants repeating. Put yourself in the shoes of your customer. From the first encounter with your organization until the last, what does he or she "experience"? Is the receptionist friendly or do you have an impersonal press-this/press-that greeting? Or do you make the call an even more exciting event by asking callers to "key in the last name of the person you are trying to reach" (forgetting that many people don't know or can't spell last names of their business contacts)? How about a direct mail letter that says call this number or return the form in the enclosed envelope, only for the recipient to not find an envelope and the people who answer the 1-800 number don't know how to help you.

You often see the similar scenario with websites--sites that have not been programmed to work with MacIntosh or some with just dysfunctional or user-unfriendly pages. You have to wonder--did anyone from the company try to use this or do they not care if the user is frustrated?

As you can see from the integration of these three concepts, in a slowing economy, there is still a lot a company can do to enhance its marketing--a lot that does not have to cost