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## Viewpoint

### Operationalizing the Brand: Aligning Promise With Reality

*It's almost impossible to satisfy the customer without internal agreement on brand experience and how to deliver it.*

by [Rob Rush](#)

Friday, April 01, 2005



Call me Marketing Guy. I like big marketing ideas. Bold promises. Sexy Web sites, glossy collateral materials, flashy TV spots, you name it. My CRM program allows me to slice-and-dice my marketing message so that each potential customer feels like I'm speaking directly to them....and I practically am. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get my brand top-of-mind, consumer by consumer.

Down the hall is my colleague, Sales Guy. He likes the razzle-dazzle too; after all, it raises awareness, gets him in the door, and helps land the account. However, Sales Guy is a bit more reticent about some of the bolder promises the company makes in its marketing materials, both to the mass market and individual. After all, Sales Guy spends a lot of time face-to-face with the customer and likes to stay involved with his accounts. So when some of the marketing promise turns out to be...a bit of a stretch, things can get uncomfortable.

Luckily, Sales Guy is an old pro and the info he keeps in his CRM database even allows him to show off a few new tricks. He knows the perfect way to disarm the customer--the right roll of the eyes, inside joke, and conspiratorial tone of voice when he says, "Well, you know those marketing guys...." In fact, the customer *does* know marketing guys, and Sales Guy and the customer have a good chuckle.

Farther down the hall sits Operations Gal. She's squarely on the front-line. What I promise, she's supposed to deliver. So when my promise far exceeds our company's operational and service capabilities...let's just say Operations Girl isn't quite as charitable as Sales Guy. And when she tells the customer "You can't possibly expect that--that @#&% Marketing Guy," no one is laughing.

This scenario may sound completely dysfunctional or unsettling familiar...or both. While it's certainly exaggerated (who has a salesperson named Sales Guy?), it probably is not too dissimilar from the silo effect that plagues many organizations. Sales and Marketing versus. Operations. Human Resources vs. Training. Corporate Headquarters versus Branch Managers. IT versus everyone. And while all of these departments are busy jousting or--worse yet--ignoring one another, who gets the short end of the proverbial stick? That's right--the customer. The customer doesn't care that marketing promised this, and IT dropped the ball on that, and HR just hired some stiff. They just want what was promised to them, delivered

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consistently.

What our company is lacking is the ability to operationalize the brand. Clearly, we have no problem creating a strong, attractive brand promise--as Marketing Guy, I have more than taken care of that. Our ads are good. The customer information in our CRM database is on point. And the brand promise is coming through loud and clear to the external audience. What's missing is the *internal* agreement on the brand experience and how to deliver on it. That level of dissonance is invisible (as it should be) to the public, but makes it virtually impossible to satisfy the customer, regardless of the technological bells and whistles you may have at your disposal.

Think about it--if the real-world delivery of the product or service in question cannot possibly match the promise of that product...well, it's safe to say that the entire customer experience is going to be short of expectations. We all know that an effective advertising and marketing campaign--fueled by the rich data housed in a CRM program--will drive consumers to your door. Once there, all future purchase behavior (desire to return and spend) is based solely on the efficacy of that experience. It's easy to make promises. It's much harder to deliver on them. Thus, the company needs to consider a Customer Experience Management (CEM) program to help operationalize the brand, and turn brand promise, customer strategy, and consumer information into operational reality.

Think about an iceberg. If you're the lookout on a ship, what you see above the water is really only about 10 percent of the iceberg. That proverbial tip of the iceberg represents the brand promise. It's the 90 percent under the water--the part that the lookout never sees, but assumes is there--that gives the iceberg its strength. That underwater portion, the brand execution, culture, leadership, alignment, discipline, and process necessary to operationalize the brand, is all addressed in an integrated CEM program.

When the brand execution is aligned with the brand promise, you have a powerful iceberg capable of sinking the *Titanic*. And when the brand execution is missing? Despite appearances on the surface, you really just have...ice cubes.

So the next time you think about a new ad campaign or software installation and wonder whether you are internally aligned to deliver on that brand promise or customer information to benefit the *customer*, ask yourself one question. Is your company an iceberg or an ice cube?

#### About the Author

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