

Brand Loyalty Starts and Ends with the Consumer

By Pam Danziger, president Unity Marketing and
author of *Why People Buy Things They Don't Need*

Brand loyalty is something that every brand company strives for and believes they can attain. All it takes is a bigger marketing budget, a new advertising campaign or another creative agency. But ultimately the brand loyalty they aim for, that is a consumer so loyally devoted to the brand that they buy it again and again, can never be achieved because they place the emphasis of brand loyalty in the wrong place. They assume that brand loyalty is something that the consumer does for them, while in reality brand loyalty is something the company and the brand do for their customer.

The brand plays an active role in getting consumers to buy. In Unity Marketing's latest research among the luxury market, we found the "brand and/or the reputation of the company" was the number one influencer on the consumers' last luxury purchase. A very close second was the "brand and/or reputation of the store" where the purchase was made. This finding underscores the synergistic connection between the product brand and where it is sold. But influencing the consumer to buy isn't the same thing as somehow transforming the consumer into a customer that always buys that brand.

At its most basic, consumers can develop a brand "habit," meaning that out of habit they reach for a specific branded product without thinking. A brand habit makes shopping easier and quicker and the eventual outcome of the purchase predictable. When I buy laundry detergent or bath soap, I don't have to contemplate all the various brands. I know which ones work for me, and that is the one I reach for. In other words, the consumer knows what to expect from the purchase. No surprises, no worries.

A higher, more refined connection of consumer with brand is through a special brand affinity. That is where some recognizable, inherent attribute of the brand touches an emotional chord with the consumer. They feel connected to the brand on a personal level. Many consumers feel an affinity to Coke as the soft drink linked with their youth. Other consumers feel affinity to branded products that they display and that others see. The Polo logo, the Coach tag, the Mercedes hood ornament, the Rolex watch label all say something about the consumer, who they are, who they aspire to be. But are these branded consumers loyal? No, they feel an affinity to the brand, but when they want to make a new statement about themselves, their values, their ideals, then they will choose another brand. So one day, you feel in a "Polo" mood and another day you're in a "Prada" mood, and another day you go for "Gap."

Brands are far more than just a marketing concept or an asset on the company's financial statement. The brand is the contract between the company and the consumer with the terms of the contract written in emotions. It is on the emotional level that consumers connect to brands. Their passion, dreams and desires are all involved with the brand.

Brand loyalty, therefore, is all about how well, effectively and completely the company's brand satisfies the consumers' needs, desires, and dreams. A brand is loyal to the consumer when it connects with the consumers' emotional desires. When that emotional connection occurs, the company may then be rewarded with some special affinity the consumer feels for the brand

which may influence them to buy again. A brand's loyalty to its customers, therefore yields consumers having an affinity for the brand. Truly connecting with the consumer on an emotional level is the key to brand loyalty and consumer affinity.

In other words, brands are made for customers, not customers made for brands. Peter Drucker said, "Marketing is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the customer's point of view." If we are to achieve consumer affinity with our brands, we need to understand the consumer, what their drives and desires are and how our brands fulfill consumer fantasies.

Ultimately the challenge for brand marketers is all about connecting why the consumer buys with how to reach them and where to reach them. How do we connect? Simple, connecting is about talking less and listening more. It's about giving more value, rather than taking more money. It's about being involved and passionate about the customer, rather than waiting for the customer to get involved with you. It's about connecting with the community and the things that matter to the consumer. It's about creating your business to satisfy the needs of your customer.

About Unity Marketing

Founded in 1992, Unity Marketing is a market research and consulting firm that specializes in luxury and emotional marketing. Pam Danziger, company founder and author of *Why People Buy Things They Don't Need*, discovers 'why people buy' through market research and translates that insight into powerful marketing messages and brand positioning. Pam is currently working on her next book, *Let Them Eat Cake: Marketing Luxury to the Masses* (as well as the Classes), to be published early in 2004.