

The following article from the November 2004 issue of *The Customer Communicator* will provide an additional perspective on the concept of personal branding. In addition to the article we've included a full-sized version of the "Building your personal brand" worksheet that appears on page 2 of the September *SkillSharpener*.

— **Editor**
The Customer Communicator
www.CustomerServiceGroup.com



Is your "personal brand" holding you back?

"A brand is nothing more than an expectation," says T. Scott Gross, a customer service consultant and author of *Positively Outrageous Service*, now in its second edition. Products and companies have brands that create consumer expectations for quality, fast and friendly service, dependability, and any number of other positive characteristics. But brands exist on the personal level as well.

Everyone creates expectations about themselves through their performance, behavior, attitude, and the values that they express. And just as marketing creates expectations in the minds of customers about your company and its products, a customer service rep's past behavior and attitude creates expectations about how they will perform in the future. And those expectations can have an effect on your career. They will certainly flavor your relationships with others in the workplace.

Brands are based on values, and a company's brands are meant to represent the company's values to the customer. Personal brands, and the behavior and attitudes that arise out of them, are also based on values. In the customer service center, your personal values, workplace values, customer values, and your company's values all come into play.

"When somebody mentions

your name, or your department, or your company, or your product," Gross adds, "there is an associated expectation based on marketing or simply past experience. On the personal level, the rhetorical question you might ask is, 'When somebody hears my name, what do I want him to think?'"

What's your brand?

Personal branding is important, because it affects the way we are perceived by customers, coworkers, and managers, says Gross. "From the clothes you wear, to the way you answer the phone, to how you speak, to the way you handle yourself at work — all of that piles together and the composite of that becomes your personal brand."

Every rep will have a "brand" in the perceptions of customers, coworkers, and managers. Problem is that in many cases the rep won't know what that brand is — and it could be negative. Think about it. Are you seen as the rep who is willing to take on the toughest problems, or one who is likely to shirk off something that becomes too complicated? Are you seen as someone who believes in the products she is handling, or someone who just sees it as a job?

"In the eyes of management, a customer service rep could be perceived as the quickest to get back

to customers, the best at defusing irate customers, or as really good at add-on sales," says Gross. But a rep might also be "the complainer, the shirker, or the one we would never give a tough assignment to."

A rep can have a brand without knowing it — "everyone has a brand whether they want to or not," says Gross. The trick is to understand what you stand for in the eyes of others — know what their expectations of you are — and find ways to manage those expectations by changing your behavior if necessary.

Managing your personal brand

How can you manage the expectations that people have of you and thereby manage your personal brand? "I think it begins with awareness," Gross says. "You have to be aware that you have a brand, and second, you have to sit back and ask: 'What do I stand for? What does it look like I stand for? Am I making it clear what I stand for?'"

"You have to be cognizant of the fact that everything you do and say creates an expectation and is an act of branding. Decide which brand you want to project, then go about managing it by monitoring what you do and say."

Your personal brand can also come into conflict with your de-

partment, company, or product “brands,” suggests Gross. And it is important for these to be in alignment as much as possible. “If your personal values and the values of your company aren’t in alignment, then you could be generating incredible amounts of stress,” he says.

To minimize the potential for stress, you should understand your personal brand and know as much as you can about the brands you are promoting, as well — the company and product brands you are handling. “A lot of customer service

reps are expected to sell or provide service for something they haven’t really experienced,” Gross says. “So getting personal and corporate brands in alignment could be as simple as understanding the product and understanding the values that your company wants to create through its branding efforts.”

“In effect,” says Gross, “customer service in general is the expression of your company’s brand — of the values that it holds. And when a rep has stress on the job, it’s because his personal values don’t match with the corporate values.”

Sometimes, a few minor adjustments in behavior and attitude can bring these values or brands into closer alignment. “At the extreme,” however, “if your values don’t match the values of the product or the values of the people that you serve, then it may be appropriate for you to go to another department or another company where your values do match and you can be more successful,” Gross says.

Contact: T. Scott Gross, T. Scott Gross & Company Inc., www.tscottgross.com. Positively Outrageous Service is available from Dearborn Trade Publishing, 800-245-2665, www.dearborntrade.com. 

The Customer Communicator

a publication of the Customer Service Group

28 West 25th Street — 8th Floor • New York, NY 10010-2705

Phone: (212) 228-0246 • Fax: (212) 228-0376 • Email: info@CustomerServiceGroup.com • Website: www.CustomerServiceGroup.com

The Customer Communicator® is published monthly by the Customer Service Group, which provides management and training materials for customer service executives, managers and representatives through its newsletters, books, support materials, and website.

© 2004 Alexander Communications Group, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Alexander Communications Group.



Building your personal brand

If you leave it to chance, your personal brand — how you are perceived by others — might not be to your liking. But you can take steps to manage it. This worksheet will help you to understand and appreciate your personal brand and to begin to manage it in a way that will help you stand out as a solid customer service representative and potential future customer service leader.

List the things that you value most in your life and work. _____

Identify the things that make you unique. What do you have in your background, education, or experience that might make you stand out as different? _____

Ask coworkers and supervisors how they perceive you — as a person and as a customer service rep. What attributes do they see in you? _____

Identify how you would like to be perceived. The difference between how others perceive you and how you would like to be perceived will give you an indication of how far you have to go. _____

What's your specialty? Is it technology, communication, people skills, etc.? What can you do to enhance your special skills? _____

Who's the target audience for your brand message? Your brand — and the skills you bring to it — may differ slightly depending on your audience. _____

Write out your brand message: What do you want people to perceive about you? _____

Create an action plan. How will you put your personal brand into effect? How will you change or adjust your work habits, your personal behavior? What can you do at staff meetings or when on the phone with customers to reinforce your personal brand? _____

www.CustomerServiceGroup.com

This worksheet was reprinted from the September 2005 issue of *SkillSharpener*.
Interested readers may learn more about frontline training and motivation materials by visiting the Customer Service Group website at <http://www.customerservicegroup.com> or phoning (212) 228-0246.
© 2005 Alexander Communications Group, Inc. All rights reserved.