ARE YOU DELIVERING ON YOUR BRAND PROMISE?
What Is A BrandPromise?  
Why Do You Need One?

The process of developing a brand, nurturing it, and continually refining it requires careful planning, with a vision for the end result in mind, much like tending to a garden. No gardener would simply scatter seeds across the ground and expect them to take root and grow on their own. The same is true for a business when creating and building their brand. For gardeners, the quality of the seeds is the first, most important factor, and for marketers, building a successful brand starts with a compelling, relevant, and credible brand promise.

Your brand promise gives consumers a reason to consider becoming a customer; it’s a promise that your brand will deliver a meaningful benefit to them. It tells consumers what to expect and sets the tone for the feelings and emotions you wish them to experience. That’s why it’s so important for marketers to carefully craft their brand promise, cultivate its growth, and monitor its success at building trusting relationships with consumers over time.

Here are some examples of leading brands and their brand promises:

• Starbucks is committed “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.”

• Lyft, the ride-sharing service, works to make good on their brand promise of “connecting the community and making people smile” by prioritizing happy drivers, short ETAs, and safety.

• GEICO includes their brand promise in every marketing message, “15 minutes or less can save you 15% or more on car insurance.” Based on a rational benefit, their brand promise is easily measured and remarkably memorable.

In this eBook, we discuss the role brand promises play to foster, grow, and strengthen relationships with consumers. We also share tips on how to ensure you are delivering on your brand promise by monitoring its effectiveness among three key stakeholder groups: employees, customers, and prospects.

Marketing research can provide valuable intelligence for developing and nurturing your brand promise. Brands do not live in static environments. Your business is changing, your customers are being bombarded with competing brand messages, and new competitors are always emerging. The essence of your brand promise lives in the mind of your customer. With marketing research, you will better understand the connection between your promise and your customers’ brand experience, and you will be able to refine your brand promise and positioning over time.
Laying the Groundwork

Delivering a strong brand promise starts from within your organization. It’s the sum total of all the actions, communications, products and services that a brand delivers to the marketplace. Therefore, it’s critical that employees fully embrace and demonstrate their company’s brand promise in all they do.

First comes the groundwork of developing an internal brand strategy that documents how you want your customers to experience your brand, including:

- Key perceptions and attitudes
- Core attributes
- Customer benefits
- Positioning
- Point of differentiation

It’s important to also consider the impact of outside industry forces as well as internal business factors on the development and delivery of your brand promise. Honing in on an authentic brand promise hinges on a keen understanding of the competitive landscape and future direction for the industry. Identifying internal factors, like potential barriers to buy-in, need to be addressed to ensure your brand promise will be embraced.

Once articulated, your brand promise needs to be shared with and understood by employees throughout the entire organization. Without this, delivery of your brand promise to consumers is bound to fall short. It’s not enough to make one announcement. Your brand promise needs to be consistently demonstrated and experienced by employees over time. For instance, consider how your brand promise is communicated to newly hired employees during the on-boarding process and subsequent training programs. Do your internal corporate communications consistently reinforce your brand promise messaging?

Do your company goals and employee performance metrics support delivering on your brand promise?
Fostering a Brand Promise from Within at Starbucks

Over the years, Starbucks has evolved to become a “lifestyle brand” that serves up more than just coffee. Their brand promise, “to inspire and nurture the human spirit,” is brought to life from within the company. For instance, company employees are addressed as ‘partners’ and treated as true collaborators in delivering exceptional customer experiences. Starbucks partners are also actively encouraged to inspire new products. For example, the company hosts monthly competitions, known as the Barista Innovation Challenge, designed to spark new drink creations.

A commitment to serving the larger community is also a core Starbucks value. Partners are invited to participate in community service activities throughout the year, and the company even provides matching grants to nonprofits where partners make personal monetary and time contributions. The cumulative effect of these types of initiatives is a demonstration of appreciation for employees and their communities, which then inspires a sincere care for their customers’ experiences.

Incorporating elements of your company’s brand promise in your dealings with employees is an essential first step. It’s also important to periodically monitor the understanding and adoption of your brand promise across your organization. Gathering feedback in employee satisfaction or engagement surveys can help you gauge the effectiveness of your internal communications and identify opportunities to strengthen your brand promise across the company. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do your employees understand the brand promise?
- Do they believe your company delivers the brand promise – or can deliver it?
- Are there any barriers or obstacles that keep them from delivering the brand promise?

If your employees are unsure about or feel they don’t have the tools they need to deliver your brand promise, there’s a very good chance your consumers aren’t experiencing it. If you find gaps in any of these areas, you should take immediate steps to address the issue.
Brand promises are not fixed in time. Marketplace innovations, shifting consumer needs, and competitive threats impact their ongoing effectiveness. Giving employees the opportunity to take part in the process of refining and enhancing your brand promise can go a long way, empowering them to bring it to life in meaningful ways.

As an example, The DRG worked with a security products manufacturer to explore ways to refine their brand positioning – and ultimately, their brand promise. The challenge was how to develop a positioning direction that would resonate with both consumer and commercial target audiences. The DRG designed a research approach to identify the core brand perceptions, associations, and aspirations that employees believed to be relevant and meaningful to both their consumer and commercial customers.

The research plan was conducted in three phases among a cross-functional group of internal stakeholders including:

- A series of in-depth employee interviews
- An online survey among senior level stakeholders
- A work session among key functional group leaders to confirm which emotional brand attributes and personality traits they wanted to communicate to both consumers and commercial users

A variety of projective techniques were employed to elicit the unique elements of the current brand promise, as understood from within the organization.

- Adjective sort to uncover emotional associations with the brand
- Brand cohort associations (cars, technology products, celebrities) to uncover feelings and perceptions about their brand and key competitors
- Brand personification to uncover personality traits and archetypes
- Sentence completion exercise to identify core brand attributes

The team then conducted a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to understand employees’ perceptions of their brand within the competitive landscape.

The research results served as the foundation for developing a refined and cohesive brand promise. Employees were excited and empowered to adopt the new umbrella positioning. With their marketing agency’s help, our client moved forward with delivering an enhanced brand promise through both internal and external communications.
Nurturing Your Brand Promise

Essentially, there are two sides to determining how well your organization is delivering on its brand promise. There’s who you, the internal brand stakeholders, believe you are (your brand promise), which we discussed in the previous chapter. Next, evaluate who your target audience believes you are (your brand reputation). Some companies believe they have a strong brand promise when, in reality, their intended audience perceives the brand quite differently. The ultimate goal is to ensure your brand’s reputation is in alignment with your intended brand promise.

The hallmark of a strong brand promise is that it effectively delivers the intended brand experience to your customers. Start by understanding what touchpoints come into play across the entire customer journey, from your website, communications, and customer service, to specific experiences using your products and services. Each interaction your customers have with your brand is a new opportunity to deliver and strengthen your promise.

Innovative Ways Lyft Brings Their Brand Promise to Life

It’s also important to differentiate between effectively delivering on your brand promise and customer satisfaction. While a customer may be satisfied with your product or service, that doesn’t necessarily mean their experience is in sync with your intended brand promise. For example, a commuter may be satisfied using Lyft to get to work on time, safely, and at a reasonable cost. Yet, it takes more than that for Lyft to fulfill their brand promise to “connect the community and make people smile.”

One way that Lyft delivers on their brand promise is with their Lyft Line Rides program. Lyft partners with a number of benefit providers to help make commuting easier and more affordable by enabling commuters to use pre-tax dollars to pay for Lyft Line rides to and from work – with savings of up to 40%. Using the Lyft Line service, commuters are matched with a vehicle that fits up to six passengers, all traveling along the same general route. Payment is set up seamlessly via the Lyft app. Being environmentally friendly by carpooling, meeting new people, saving money, getting on-demand door-to-door service – what’s not to smile about?
While you may believe your products or services deliver a positive experience and are in alignment with your intended brand promise, it’s still not a good idea to assume this is the case. Just as a garden needs to be carefully nurtured, marketers need to evaluate and monitor customers’ brand perceptions and experiences to be sure their brand promise is being delivered. One way to gather customer feedback on the brand promise is to incorporate questions into your existing satisfaction and experience research. Such questions might include:

- In what ways does your brand meet and/or exceed customers’ expectations?
- What attributes do your customers use to describe the brand?
- What emotions do they feel when using your products or services?
- How do customers compare your brand to other competitive products or services?

To get at the more in-depth, deep-seated perceptions and emotions, you may consider conducting qualitative research in addition to quantitative. Remember that your consumers are not consciously thinking about your brand nearly as often as those within your organization. In fact, most of their brand impressions are subconscious and are best elicited through projective techniques, or observational research like in-home studies or shop-alongs.

Assessing how well you are delivering on your brand promise is not a one-and-done exercise. Tracking perceptions over time will help monitor how well your brand promise is being received within an ever-changing marketplace. In particular, such factors as emerging competitors, new product entrants, or shifting economic conditions can impact how your customers perceive your brand promise. Of course, periodically comparing your consumers’ brand perceptions against your employees’ brand perceptions is also important. If the two are out of sync, a course correction is in order.

**Remember,** you are only delivering on your brand promise if your customers believe you do. And the only way to know for sure is to ask your customers.
An insurance provider engaged The DRG to develop an ongoing customer experience and satisfaction tracking study. This study provided the perfect opportunity to gather data monitoring the health and delivery of our client’s brand promise while assessing performance on meeting and exceeding customer expectations.

By conducting monthly surveys with both insurance plan members and non-members, we provided continuous insight into the effectiveness of brand promise delivery for our client and in comparison to their closest competitors. Key aspects of the survey tapped into consumers’ experiences across a spectrum of brand touchpoints, such as enrollment or renewal, receiving the benefits of coverage, and awareness and perceptions of products, services, offerings, and communications. In addition to monitoring the more transactional aspects of the brand relationship, the survey gathered data that probed into their emotional involvement with the brand.

• Do they feel confident?
• How informed are they?
• Does the insurance give them peace of mind?
• Do the products and services bring them value?
• Is the organization easy and convenient to work with?

We then synthesized consumer feedback on their experience, satisfaction, and brand health metrics to identify opportunities to strengthen the client’s brand promise and enhance its delivery. For instance, we helped our client set goals for improving key metrics which were incorporated into employee compensation plans. Insights from the research also helped refine communication strategies improving brand promise messaging to members and prospects alike.
Preparing for Future Growth

A compelling brand promise is the key to attracting prospects and enticing them to try your product or service. The first step is to build brand awareness. However, beyond gaining mere brand name recognition, successful brands engage future customers, via their brand promise, by being:

- Relevant – Fulfilling a basic consumer need
- Meaningful – Delivering higher-order emotional benefits
- Compelling – Driving curiosity and interest in the brand
- Differentiating – Clearly standing apart from competitors

Today, more than ever before, brands need to deliver emotional benefits and give their consumers a reason to care. Research, like Havas Media Group’s Meaningful Brands Study, shows that consumers become more likely to trust in, purchase, remain loyal to, and recommend a brand when the brand truly delivers on its promise.

GEICO: A Tried and True Brand Promise

“GEICO is a perfect example of why positioning matters. Why buy from GEICO? To save money. This is the core of the brand; GEICO is a reputable company with low rates.”

– Tim Calkins, Professor, Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management

Their brand promise, captured memorably by their tagline, “15 minutes or less can save you 15% or more on car insurance,” is straightforward and quantifiable. In a crowded category like car insurance, being able to quickly and simply evaluate the cost of coverage delivers valuable benefits. The potential to save car owners money on this necessary service is immediately meaningful, compelling, and worth the time to check out. GEICO has captured a unique position in the minds of consumers through consistent and memorable marketing communications. Lastly, trust in the brand is engendered every time it delivers on its promise. The proof is in the numbers. In his annual letter to shareholders, Warren Buffet wrote that, “GEICO’s cost advantage is the factor that has enabled the company to gobble up market share year after year. We ended 2015 with 11.4% of the market, compared to 2.5% in 1995.”
Admittedly, few brands have a media budget the size of GEICO’s. Still, the lessons learned from their success as a challenger brand in a highly competitive marketplace are relevant to even a start-up brand with a local presence. The best way to foster sustainable growth among new customers is by honing in on your brand’s core reason for being. Then, consistently communicate it to your target audience in word and actions.

Conducting research to monitor perceptions of your brand and to verify effective communication of your brand promise will give you the information you need to ensure your brand promise is attractive to prospects and is clearly understood. Key questions to ask include:

- Do your target audience’s perceptions and attitudes about your brand fit with your brand promise?
- Is your brand promise relevant and meaningful to them?
- Do they believe you can deliver on it?
- What consumer expectations need to be met in order to make good on your promise?
- How do perceptions of your brand compare to those of your competitors?

Digging into your target audience’s mindset will reveal where your brand lives in the present and give you the market intelligence to know what’s needed to grow a stronger connection with prospective customers.

**Case Study: Leveraging Brand Strength to Reach New Audiences**

Corporate transformations, acquisitions, and re-branding initiatives are great opportunities to grow and strengthen your brand. After completing a large acquisition of clinics and a subsequent re-branding effort, a healthcare client wanted to assess brand awareness and perceptions among their newly expanded market. They needed to evaluate communication of their brand promise and understand how their brand was positioned in the marketplace.

The DRG conducted an online survey among current patients to understand perceptions of the re-branded clinics compared to the former brands of the acquired clinics. We also gathered feedback from patients of other clinics in the market to evaluate impressions of our client’s brand versus direct competitors.

The research findings revealed that, even among patients, there was little differentiation between clinics in the area, confirming the need for our client to refine their brand promise and reinforce their message. The DRG identified relevant, meaningful brand attributes that patients most closely associated with the rebranded clinic network. Our client then leveraged these core associations to strengthen their brand promise and develop compelling marketing communications that better differentiated their healthcare network.
Taking Stock of Your Brand Promise Delivery

Delivering on your brand promise is essential to the growth of your business. However, there are no simple formulas for making that happen. The effectiveness of your brand promise depends on a myriad of factors. Evidence of its success can be seen in many quantifiable ways, from sales data and brand awareness figures, to volume of positive word of mouth and even employee turnover. To truly understand the impact of your brand promise, whether internally among employees or externally among consumers, you need to engage with those audiences directly.

That’s where marketing research can serve you best. It can be a powerful way to interact with your target audiences, helping you dig deep into understanding their experiences with your brand. Gaining true insight into those relationships can uncover ways to strengthen connections between your brand, your employees, your current customers, and future ones.

In the words of Muhtar Kent, chairman and CEO of The Coca Cola Company, “If a good brand is a promise, then a great brand is a promise kept.”

Is your brand keeping its promise?