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It's not news that we operate in a world where consumers rule. And I suspect no one will argue that with all the options available for virtually any amusement and entertainment product or service, and the high expectations for personalized attention and service, consumer power over brands is getting nothing but stronger. Today as businesses experience sluggish sales, and economic uncertainty is looming around every corner, many brands are even more beholden to customer's whims and desperate to get and keep their business.

Given these factors and many others affecting business, technology and consumer markets, it's time to rethink how we engage with customers, and not a moment too soon. You can capture a larger market share and build lasting relationships with your customers by creating an inter-active environment. We need to meld lights, sound and action into a synergistic experience that stimulates the five senses: sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste.

Customers that give brand experience an extremely high satisfaction rating are 2.5 times more likely to come back than customers that rate their overall satisfaction as average. An Accenture survey states that only about 25 percent of customers experiencing what they rated as "average" service would consider returning in the future, and only 19 percent indicated they would remain loyal to the brand that delivered average service.

This is pretty scary news for business owners, even if you are really good at what you do. Apparently customers expect a lot more today than ever before. Beyond adequate service, consumers want to be thrilled and entertained and are willing to pay for the value they get. Think about your own personal purchasing behavior. What excites you? Is it the business environment, the product, the price, the activity, a visit to a great

Lights, sound, action: Building trust and value

website or compelling print piece of advertising? Chances are it is the experience. If you are in roller skating, bowling, laser tag or a family entertainment center, you had better be aware of what your consumers expect.

When was the last time you took time to sit with parents and ask why they chose your business over all the others? Have you done it with all age groups? It is your obligation to find out what they are thinking and ask for the feedback. This is a sure-fire way to build lasting relationships with consumers. They will love you when they know you care.

The dictionary definition of experience is "acquiring knowledge through the senses rather than through abstract reasoning." In marketing, interactive experiences are highly successful forms of selling. When consumers are engaged they can feel what it is like to use your products and services, the chances of becoming a loyal consumer are far greater.

Things that matter

You have large buildings with space. Effective and creative use of the space will determine how successful your business will be. Developing and creating an "inter-active sense of place" environment will elevate your business success.

Balance or replace your sound systems. Your customers are accustomed to great sound with their iPods, car audio systems and home entertainment centers and they expect great sound delivery wherever they go.

Update your lighting systems with new technology and effects to help you create an age appropriate mood-setting environment for your consumers.

Use contemporary interior colors and graphics that are age neutral. Colors that appeal to most consumers can be exciting and soothing visually. Your target market is generally 5 - 55 years old.

Create memorable experiences to add value to your programs and services. Planned activities, games and promotions add substantial perceived value to the overall experience.

Experiences that build trust are those that:

Enable customers to engage with staff and management.

Deliver pleasant surprises. How cool is it if customers win something for the first time in their lives because they participated in an activity or game?

Educate customers about all aspects of the activity they are engaging in, making sure it is socially interactive, healthy and fun.

Result in a value far beyond what the customer paid for. It really makes someone feel good to know they got more than expected.

Other memorable experiences are those that allow people to live differently while they are in your venue. Always remember - your rink may be the only place in someone's life where he or she really feels connected, special and important. Getting to know your customers on a first name basis will establish a bond that will increase frequency of visits and increase business profitability.

No matter what business you're in, you can create experiences that drive repeat business and ultimately long term loyalty. Rethink how you engage customers, what type of information you share with them, opportunities you offer and the memorable experiences you create. Move beyond meeting; concentrate on exceeding customer's expectations and start creating memorable experiences that will create trust, value and something worth talking about.

It is common knowledge that the customers you already have form the base of your target market. You can begin increasing your revenues immediately by building trust bonds and value perception simply by improving the way you handle **LIGHTS, SOUND... ACTION!**

HOT TRENDS by Bill Carlson

The above list will go a long way in developing a bond of trust with your customers. Without trust, offering an exciting or thrilling experience is an act of futility. With trust, an innovative experience that ignites enthusiasm and buzz can place you way above your competition and do wonders for your bottom line.

Research shows that:

Three out of five consumers won't do business with a brand they do not trust.

42% will buy more from a brand they trust.

54% will recommend a brand they trust to others.

In our surveys that we conduct, in the amusement and entertainment industry, we find that trust is the number one reason consumers gravitate away from a facility or activity. The trust bond can easily be broken by a bad experience with one employee; inappropriate music being played; lack of security, safety or cleanliness of bathrooms; failure to uphold rules of conduct; food & beverage quality or service; and worst of all - lack of fun!

**Trivia Question
Answer:
In what month is National Museum Day?
Answer: September**