

TOM

The Remarkable Chimera

ASACKER

“Remarkable is necessary to market today, because unremarkable products don’t get talked about, they just fade away.”

— *Seth Godin*

The chimera is indeed a remarkable beast, with the head of a lion, body of a goat, and a serpent's tail. It's also a myth that has faded away. But that's not what I'm referring to in the title. What I mean is that “remarkable” is a chimera. The popular notion that today's brands must be Blue Ocean, purple cow, over the top, pulse-quickening magic to have a chance at engaging the attention and loyalty of the finicky and skeptical masses is the biggest chimera going. And for the very simple reason that it doesn't match reality.

Don't take my word for it. Sit down and make a list of the products you own, the establishments you frequent, the TV shows you watch, the sales professionals you work with, the books you've read, where you buy your gas, drop off your dry cleaning, grab a sandwich, work out, etc., etc., etc. Now, next to each “brand”, write down the last time that you can remember raving about it to your family and friends. Done already? Right, and that's because “remarkable” brands are a very, very small portion of your marketplace choices.

The Chosen Few

Apple, Amazon, Starbucks, Cirque de Soleil, Harley, Virgin, Build-a Bear, Jet Blue, and Google are all special brands that were fortunate enough to have entered the zeitgeist and are, therefore, continuously remarked about in business books, on blogs, during keynote speeches, and in the popular press. And all of that earned and social media have contributed much to their marketplace achievements; increasing awareness and sales while helping to lower marketing costs. So make no mistake: Being remarkable is a very smart business goal. However, being *unremarkable* is not a path to obscurity, and it's certainly not the curse of brand death.

Many of my favorite brands, the ones I trust and choose, are unremarkable brands. At least they are to me. I rarely feel compelled to talk about Press'n Seal wrap (although the stuff is quite extraordinary) or AVG's anti virus software. I also can't remember remarking about UPS, my Sony Vaios, my New Balance running shoes, or Gillette's razor blades. My Toyota Camry? An amazing feat of engineering and operational excellence that I simply enjoy owning. My financial advisor and tax accountant? Two of the most honest, caring and trust-worthy people I've ever have the privilege of knowing. But remarkable? Perhaps to their significant others.

It's *not* remarkable that I can walk one block from my office and purchase a hearty lunch at a reasonable price. It's *not* remarkable that I can wander into the pub after a long day of work and hear the sweet sound of my name and have a pint of my favorite ale pulled as I approach the bar. It's *not* remarkable when I order a book from Amazon or an obscure movie from Netflix and find it in my mail box a few days later (actually it is, but I still don't talk about it). And I don't tell my friends about Panera Bread's decent coffee and free WI-FI, nor do I email my friends about tear-by-hand packaging tape.

So what do these unremarkable, yet successful brands all have in common? What are they delivering to the world, if not something to talk about? Simple: They're all unique and valuable, to me and to many people like me. They connect with their audience's feelings and reassure those feelings. They communicate expectations in clear, unvarnished ways, and consistently deliver on those expectations. They stay passionately focused on what truly matters to customers *now*, instead of being diverted by what's *next* in the world of marketing and media.

The Evolution of Value

The modern marketplace is primarily an individualistic, do-it-yourself, and better oneself pursuit. And as such, customers are constantly on the lookout for better "value." Today, customers not only want the brands they choose to be reliable and fair, they also want them to look good, be good, and do good. Yes they want to save time and money, but they also want to be uniquely acknowledged, involved and engaged. So to stay relevant, brands must evolve with customers' evolving concept of value. They must frequently reinvent themselves to stay fresh and uniquely add value to the brand experience. It requires vision, belief in collaborative innovation, empathy for the customer, and a passion for experimentation. But remarkability?

Don't buy into the ramblings of the marketing blogosphere and worry about how brightly the spotlight is shining on your brand. You do not have to be worthy of remark to be worthy of your customers' business. You can build your brand by being convenient, fun, reliable and friendly. You can grow your business by being innovative and hard-working, honest and empathetic. Build it with warm smiles, kind words, small, unselfish acts and heart-felt thank yous. It probably won't get you passed around on YouTube or Twitter, but it will create happy customers and repeat business. Remember, it doesn't matter what people think about you or your brand. What matters is how you make them feel about themselves and their decisions in your presence. And that's what's really important when marketing a brand today.

Note: I know this is an unremarkable article, but please email it to your list any way. :)