



Branded Customer Service – The New Competitive Edge

By Janelle Barlow and Paul Stewart,
Berrett-Koehler (San Francisco).

Reviewer: Graham Medcalf

So many branding books have been published over the past decade that it's hard not to greet yet another one on the same subject with a degree of cynicism. So I was pleasantly surprised to read a book that takes a look at the pervading brand dissonance and promotes the competitive advantages of aligning customer service with brand values.

"Branded Customer Service" takes branding that all-important one step further by detailing the strategic and organised way to deliver on-brand customer experiences that magnify the brand promise.

As an advertising man I was often appalled at the marketing fraternity's obsession with advertising brand values without paying

heed to the actual customer experience.

I can't remember how many times I've watched bank advertising that promises its customers so much, only to read research results on customer satisfaction that are at odds with what is being advertised.

Barlow and Stewart provide hands-on, tested processes and ideas that can be adapted to make unique brands bigger, and fortunately for readers in this part of the world, include some local examples.

"Branded Customer Service" does this in three parts: firstly, linking branding to customer service, then advising on how to embed on-brand service into organisational DNA and finally, providing a customer service toolbox.

The authors show how companies over-promise and under-deliver and demonstrate how to use the

twin pillars of branding products and service to gain a competitive edge. They get to the essence of customer service branding strategies and show how staff can be the key to successful brands.

What I liked most was the practical guide for changing the culture of an organisation through internal communications to produce brand champions. New Zealand is not known for its high level of customer service so I would recommend this book to all business managers regardless of their portfolios.

The toolbox of on-brand exercises is relevant to all parts of a company's operations, not just the marketing department.

Generic customer service is no longer enough and if the dissatisfaction with local customer service is anything to go by, this book is long overdue. Buy the book and circulate it throughout your company.