

# inside-out

LINKING INSIGHTS TO ACTIONS: What questions does the AmEx Brand Snap raise? Certainly a few, it would seem! **2**

TOOL-BOX EXERCISE: On-brand supply: On-brand service. A team exercise to get everyone thinking around the brand fit of suppliers and strategic partners. **2**

STORY TIME: Brand Stories –Worth Their Weight in Memories, Appeal, and Differentiation! **3**

KNOW HOW – CAN DO: In touch with the Brand Trail Blazers – our pilot group at the inaugural On-Brand Simulator Camp in Las Vegas.

And a peak inside the groovy and delicious Branded Customer Service Tool-Kit. **4**

Psst! Don't be shy. **on-brand** **off-brand** is free to print, rip, or post. Just remember to retain our copyright, or we might haunt you in your dreams!

We'd love your feedback: [Janelle.Barlow@brandedservice.com](mailto:Janelle.Barlow@brandedservice.com) [Paul.Stewart@brandedservice.com](mailto:Paul.Stewart@brandedservice.com)

Subscribe to **on-brand**/**off-brand** at [www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com)

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please click here: [unsubscribe@brandedservice.com](mailto:unsubscribe@brandedservice.com)

# Killing Your Brand with Attachments

American Express is a fantastic brand, well known, highly respected, and affiliated with good products. On their website, AmEx says “since our founding 150 years ago, American Express has become synonymous with trust and confidence.” Great promise! JANELLE BARLOW RECALLS A RECENT EXPERIENCE.

**off-brand**

However, it seems like not everyone at AmEx has bought into the brand. Recently I opened a mailer from AmEx which contained a document that looks for all the world like a nice little check for \$62.00. In fact it was labeled VIP Thank-You Certificate, with the Thank-You Status Guaranteed. AND it was “Reserved for Valued Cardmembers.”

To redeem the certificate I needed to order a series of DVDs for the price of \$9.97 each, and then I would save \$62.00 on top of that! Nice offer. I bit. Messages on top of all the luscious looking movies read, “Claim your VIP Thank-You before it expires!”

So, I called the Customer Service number to order the DVD's to the tune of \$62.00. Don't ask me why I called. I could have just sent in the order. I'm glad I didn't!

Even the AmEx woman I talked with was confused by the offer. Her computer showed that we would owe \$69.79 for 7 DVDs, plus shipping and handling. This sounded great. We assumed we would subtract the \$62.00 check from AmEx and for the very low price of \$11.74 I would own 7 classic DVDs. Not bad.

Unfortunately, the woman couldn't work out how to credit us with that \$62.00 check. Turns out, with further investigation, that the \$62.00 wasn't a check at all, but was a statement for how much we would have saved if we had bought these DVDs at full retail price.

Sure enough, on the inside of the return envelope, in tiny print “VIP Thank-You is a savings off the retail value of selections available elsewhere. Maximum Value based on the ten highest valued titles for \$9.97 each and is not a credit to your account.”

Ouch. Everything about this offer spoke of a value of \$62.00 that AmEx was offering us as a Thank-you. Turns out it wasn't such a big Thank-you after all.

So, now a little advertisement has turned into several service mishaps and lack of confidence. And, of course, sharing the story in this venue.

Perhaps they should err on the side of “yes any good reasonable thinking person might view this as a bit shady,” so let's not run the risk of tarnishing the brand. That makes brand sense!



> LINKING INSIGHTS TO ACTIONS

# skills

**HARD AND FAST**  
LINKING INSIGHTS TO ACTIONS

## Questions raised by the AmEx experience:

- 1 Do such offers diminish brand value more than they create? Frankly, completely off-brand for AmEx – it was not “synonymous with trust and confidence.” The experience was out of line with the expectations they had created. The number one reason consumers tell us they don’t trust companies is “they don’t deliver on their promises.”
- 2 Did the custodians of the brand at American Express even know about this offer? If so, are they serious about the brand? What are they doing to evaluate such offers from the brand strategy and customer-centric point of view? And are they educating staff about the AmEx brand experience?
- 3 And how does a company like American Express measure the impact of this type of offer? Unless companies have some way to measure impact, they have no way to assess the impact on their brand value. Just tracking the number of people expressing their dislike of such an offer – once we figured out what the offer was – would tell American Express something.
- 4 Unfortunately, the Customer Service rep said Janelle couldn’t lodge a complaint. Quite amusing really, since she answered a line called “Customer Service.” After much pushing, she connected Janelle through to another number – Hertz in Canada! (and hurt is exactly how she felt.)
- 5 Call her persistent! Janelle called back and got a supervisor who told her she would pass the comments along. Doesn’t sound too brand strong, does it? And would she let Janelle know American Express’ reaction? “Perhaps,” she said.

Anybody want to take a \$62 VIP Thank-You Certificate bet on that!

# On-brand supply: On-brand service

Customer service delivery is only as good as the elements that go into creating it, so aligning with providers that fit well with your brand promise and values can have a significant impact. If there is a big disconnect, this will no doubt impact the experiences wanted for customers – especially if these suppliers directly interact with your customers. For example, if you outsource your call-center functions, how can you be sure the service offered will be on-brand for your organization?

**THIS EXERCISE HELPS ASSESS WHETHER SUPPLIER/PARTNERS OF ALL TYPES (IT PROVIDERS, RECRUITMENT AGENCIES, LEGAL ADVISORS, PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANTS, TRAINING PROVIDERS...) ARE ON-BRAND OR OFF-BRAND FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION.**

## on-brand

Ask managers to list their suppliers. Remind the managers that if they outsource their service contracts and customers have a problem with that service provider, customers will not distinguish between the service provider and the brand.

Ask managers to consider the following questions:

- **Do they think about brand fit when evaluating the alternatives?** It is important to be clear in explaining your brand, and clarifying what you expect and what you offer in relation to an on-brand relationship.
- **How do they treat their suppliers?** It is unlikely for suppliers to be consistently on-brand if they are mistreated. Are suppliers paid on time? Are their telephone

calls returned? Are commitments to them followed through?

- **How they can ensure** that their suppliers deliver services or products to customers in the same way the organization delivers its services and products?

Encourage managers to set up a brand orientation for suppliers when entering into relationships with them.

Interested in more exercises and activities to help you become on-brand? Join the Branded Customer Service on-line Resource Center [www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com)

“...”Julie is not here today, so Janelle shops at a store selling one normally deals with the same sales Christmas, when the store was filled, walked up to her as soon as she entered. “Hi Janelle, Julie is not here today, Janelle checked out her purchases, were in.”



*Using stories and anecdotes to illustrate, inspire, and analyze on-brand service, lies at the heart of the Branded Customer Service pathway. Here's just one way they can work for you.*

# Brand Stories – Worth Their Weight in Memories, Appeal, and Differentiation!

How many hotel practices contribute to higher revenues? Staff costs, room pricing, booking availability, operational costs, and loyal fans.

To measure and manage these is a complex process, but fortunately all sorts of professionals will do the necessary research and steer you in the right direction. The Cornell University School of Hotel Administration ([www.hotelschool.cornell.edu](http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu)), for example, has numerous research studies available. There is no single answer of course, and ultimately the mix of practices used varies widely among hotels.

Then why is it that hotels are so much alike when it comes to personal customer service? Definitely the rooms vary, the little extras vary, and now some hotels differentiate themselves by the technology they make available to guests.

However when it comes to service, a good hotel, indeed a top-notch hotel, tends to have the same feel to it as any other. Staff are polite, eager to serve, and attempt to learn your name. All of this is good, but this feeling probably doesn't turn us into the loyal raving "gotta go back there" type of fans.

How could you make this happen? Clearly guest loyalty depends on what the guests think about the hotel or its chain. As well as personal experiences, the "stories" attached to them help define the guest's perception of that hotel. They make the stay exciting, memorable, worth sharing with others.

"You wouldn't believe where I stayed this past week. I was in the very room that Marilyn Monroe stayed in when she visited New Orleans in 1958."

Why else do people want to go to sites where famous movies are shot? It's so they can get inside the story of life. Tourists are jamming New Zealand still so they can see where Lord of the Rings was shot, and fuel their imaginations about Middle Earth.

Real stories (don't make them up!), that guests can relate to, take place all the time. The key is to capture and then use them. Tell them to guests at the Manager's cocktail hour, through the in-house magazine, or have USA Today write about them. And of course the front-desk clerk, the bellman, and anyone who interacts with customers can weave them into conversations.

At Branded Customer Service we know hundreds of these stories. The one on this page is a favorite. Janelle has told this story dozens of times to thousands of people around the world. People say that the way it is told the hairs on their arms stand up. While the beds, the friendliness, and the speed of service may all be about the same, a story like the Edgar Allan Poe book is entirely unique.

That story belongs to ARAMARK Harrison Lodging, but you've got your own as well! Now start spreading the word. Give your customers a chance to relate to you on the level of stories – something unique that they will never forget.

## ARAMARK Harrison Lodging – brand promise: Customer Focus.

These Lodges are very good. No doubt about that. But sometimes their guest services absolutely shine. One guest showed up at one of the conference centers looking dejected. When the front-desk clerk asked if anything was wrong, the man said he had left his antique copy of an Edgar Allan Poe mystery story on the airplane. To make matters worse, he had read only to chapter 4! The clerk took it upon herself to go to a close-by antique bookshop to see if the book was available. It was. She purchased it and placed it in the guest's room – with a bookmark deftly placed at chapter 4.



# who said what

CREATING THE LIVING BRAND – BY NEELI BANDAPUDI AND VENKAT BENDAPUDI:

Any company can deliver outstanding customer service—even convenience stores, where low pay and high turnover supposedly make service a problem. The secret: generating a bond between employees and the brand.

—*Harvard Business Review*

**BRAND TRAIL BLAZERS:** Last month 16 consultants and business executives from 10 countries attended the inaugural On-Brand Simulator Camp held in Las Vegas. We would like to congratulate all of them on graduating as Branded Customer Service Certified Consultants. The group branded themselves Brand Trail Blazers and it was a fantastic experience for everyone involved. Here are some of the things they had to say:



“The On-Brand Simulator Camp is rich with content, a truly extraordinary and enriching experience.” —*Elcee Asuncion Villa, Managing Director, Management Strategies (Malaysia)*

“The most commonsense, effective, and efficient way to build and develop brands – don’t get left behind!” —*Anthony Kirchner, Head of Customer and Partner Servicing, Adelaide Bank*

“We are totally committed to Branded Customer Service, so much so that it is central to our strategic business plan. The Tool-Kit is an amazing resource for our team to lead the way in the company.” —*Camille Mercier, Director HR, Spirit Mountain Casino*

“If you are serious about doing anything in this area for your organization don’t go past Branded Customer Service. The Tool-Kit is in a class of its own compared to anything I have ever seen.” —*Sally-Ann Huson, Senior Partner, TMI Australia*

“The Tool-Kit is simply amazing – far beyond what I expected. The design is cutting-edge... it will jump start your organization.” —*Rich McLafferty, Brand Guru, Boost Mobile*

You can view video testimonials from these and others at [www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com)

# know how CAN DO

**We’ve launched! But what a past few months it has been.**

The on-line Resource Center is live, the Tool-Kit (described as a transformation in how to package consulting IP) is available for purchase, and in late May the first On-Brand Simulator Camp for Certified Consultants was an outstanding success.

Oh! And Branded Customer Service – the new competitive edge by Janelle Barlow and Paul Stewart was a highly commended semi-finalist in the business category of the 2005 Independent Publishers (IPPY) Book Awards.



## CHECK OUT THE BRANDED CUSTOMER SERVICE TOOL-KIT

We’re all very excited about the Tool-Kit, which you can see in all its glory at [www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com). Here’s a little peek at what the first purchasers are already relishing...



## BECOME A BRANDED CUSTOMER SERVICE CERTIFIED CONSULTANT

Registrations are now open for two more On-Brand Simulator Camps to be held in 2005:

**19th-24th September, Las Vegas**

**7th-12th November, Las Vegas**

[www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com)



[www.brandedservice.com](http://www.brandedservice.com)

If you haven’t visited the website recently, take a look. It may look similar, but it’s totally new and complete, with new ideas, inspiration, and product information. Plus the on-line Resource Center. If you want to know more, email our webmaster [webmaster@brandedservice.com](mailto:webmaster@brandedservice.com)

