Perception and Satisfaction

Businesses rely heavily on the cache they cultivate through providing quality goods and services. That level of quality and customer satisfaction can greatly influence how the public perceives a business and, fair or not, that perception can become cemented as reality in the minds of the public. Charles Loelius, Laundry and Valet Manager of The Pierre hotel in New York, is acutely aware of that balancing act. He knows firsthand how marketing endeavors are steered by how customers view the hotel and how satisfied they are with services.

Explaining how The Pierre is able to attract customers and turn them into repeat patrons, Loelius says, “We are not in the business of renting hotel rooms, but in creating memorable experiences for our guests.”

Using those experiences to its advantage, The Pierre relies heavily on its reputation as part of its marketing structure. “Our guests generally perceive The Pierre as an old world hotel with modern conveniences, and that is how we market ourselves,” Loelius notes. Working to maintain that image allows The Pierre to use its very services as advertisement for its brand.

Projecting Quality

How a hotel or other hospitality service projects its overall brand image is inextricably tied to the quality of that business’ goods and services. Perception of quality, Loelius explains, is connected to how the goods and services being sold are packaged.

“Our lobby is ornate, but not overly furnished,” he says as he describes The Pierre. “We use gentle lighting and soft colors to create a quiet environment. Hotel guests, ours included, perceive quiet surroundings as luxury surroundings. Loud lobbies are generally perceived to be something less than luxurious.”

For Loelius, then, the sum experience of staying in The Pierre is enhanced and made possible every detail, from the employee uniforms to the elevator operators dressed in pristine white gloves. The Pierre markets itself as a high quality establishment catering to high-end clientele, and meeting those expectations of such quality is key to maintaining both that image and the hotel’s revenue stream.

As Debra Ellis of Social Media Today notes, “If people expect an exceptional experience, anything less is disappointing.” Keeping the packaging and gloss on the product helps lure back repeat customers, “improving customer loyalty and reducing costs.”

Loelius takes particular note of how The Pierre handles its linens for both the bedroom and the bathroom, explaining that the care the hotel takes with hotel linens and guest’s personal items gives the customers that “final touch of elegance.” How the linens are laundered, according to Loelius, is just as important as the materials used to create them.

Loelius has chosen an attitude toward marketing and packaging that manufacturers apply to the promotion of consumer goods. Scott Young of Perception Research Services cautions producers that “the ‘norm’ is competition.” Hotels like The Pierre realize this and adjust their branding strategies accordingly in an effort to stand out from the crowd. Providing such unique services and attention to detail produces customers who are more like to call on a hotel’s services again.

Navigating the Waters of Social Media

With the prevalence of social media in our daily lives, a business’ brand identity has become increasingly more important to maintain, uphold, and constantly and consistently manage. Up to the recent past, consumers only had the outlets of letter writing, phone calls, and email to voice their praises and admonishments for services rendered. However, with the advent of such social media and review websites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Angie’s List, consumers have multiple venues with which to air their experiences and recommendations for a business’ services. Reviews blasted en
masse using social media can bolster or lower a company’s cache and thus affect that company’s brand perception by the public.

This is particularly true in the hospitality and hotel segment of the linen industry. Hotels and other similar locations to hang one’s hat during travel rely heavily on social media and review websites for their advertising endeavors. Given enough poor showings on sites such as Expedia and Trip Advisor and potential customers may choose to throw their travel dollars to other establishments or properties. Again, the adage “perception is reality” holds true in marketing. When enough voices with similar opinions are heard on the Internet and in the public sphere at large, what people say you are often becomes what everyone sees as true.

But that hardly means that brand image cannot be managed from the other side of the aisle. To the contrary, Loelius contends that even poor reviews from travelers can be spun into positive results down the road.

“That Pierre has received very few unfavorable reviews, due to our success in doing it right the first time,” Loelius explains. “We take all reviews, internal and external, quite seriously; all reviews favorable and unfavorable alike are answered via e-mail when we have that information.”

That attitude toward social media—absorbing the less favorable reviews with the good—contributes to The Pierre’s success. By acknowledging problem areas and complaints from customers, The Pierre can reevaluate its accommodations and services to better suit their patrons’ needs.

And according to experts, Loelius’ strategy is the best plan of attack to address poor online reviews. In an article for CMS Wire, Mark Brandt says that knowing where the reviews are posted online and having a plan in place to deal with such-delicate image issues is key to staving off a potentially problematic social media disaster.

“To prepare for and deal with negative perceptions…identify where, how, and why people are saying what they’re saying,” Brandt explains.

After focusing on those services, the hotel then sometimes asks customers who had poor experiences back, providing upgraded or complimentary rooms for a second crack at impressing their guests.

However, as Loelius suggests, this is often not necessary.

“Since the vast majority of our reviews are highly favorable, that fact alone serves as a marketing tool,” he explains. “I have based most of my travel decisions on Trip Advisor reviews, and believe our prospective guests rely on them as well.”

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Turning Perception into Reality

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