



## Say You're Sorry

Whether it was tripping your little sister or stealing a cookie before dinner, we've all done it. We all remember the times when, as a child, we mischievously did something we knew we weren't supposed to do. And, even worst, we all remember the immediate moments thereafter when our parents glared us down and demanded an apology. And, so, there we were. With our hands in our pockets and our head timidly facing the floor, we said, "I'm sorry."

As we've grown older and our blunders more complex than simply stealing a cookie, we often do more than just say, "I'm sorry." Apologizing and presenting someone with flowers when you forget to pick them up at the airport means much more than just a simple "sorry." When you fail to deliver on your promise, you lose respect and, as a result, loyalty.

With a practice that's been ingrained in our heads since our first parental reprimand, why is it so difficult for some Brands to get it? When a Brand fails to deliver a great experience, it is easy to think, "well, we can't please every one of our target consumers every single time," and, as a result, their Brand fails miserably and falls to the wayside. But if they think, "we are really sorry, and we will do what it takes to please our unsatisfied customers," then they'll have a Brand that will make devout followers out of all of us.

Satisfying disgruntled or unsatisfied customers is one easy way Brands can distinguish themselves from the pack. A Brand can generate some serious recognition and loyalty among their unhappy consumers by, first off, offering an easy way for consumers to provide complaints.

The Tide Fabric Care Network provides its customers with a very impressive and comprehensive complaint center (view it here). The website allows the consumer to give feedback on the various Tide products, and it even asks the consumer to conduct a "mood check," with moods ranging from thrilled to furious. What's more, the site asks for the store where the Tide product was purchased. With such detailed information in their complaint center, Tide is able to attain market research at a low cost as well as identify their consumers' needs and wants.

Following up with a disappointed customer is another good way to help ensure an enjoyable experience. When a complaint was made to American Airlines, a letter was finally received three months later. Granted, most people would give up waiting for a response after a week, but American Airlines did send a personalized letter and a travel voucher to the unsatisfied consumer.

In another situation, when Travelocity actually asked a customer to rate their recent travel experience and the customer responded as very disappointed, Travelocity never followed up with the customer. Why ask if you aren't intending to do anything about it? When a customer expresses dissatisfaction, it should become standard to expect a response within days, not weeks. At a time when we all seek instant gratification, a timely reply can be a very powerful way for a Brand to show care and concern.

And, furthermore, when you do follow up with a customer, make it personable. When a complaint was made to Dunkin' Donuts about repeated lousy service, an envelope was received three weeks later. In the envelope, there was neither a letter nor a business card from any head of authority. Rather, there was one small and lonely coupon for a free small coffee! Sending a personalized letter with, perhaps, a voucher for any coffee would have proven to be a more personal touch. As with any situation, a small gift and personalization can drastically change a negative attitude into a positive one.

Another way to honor a promise is by building in assurances for the customer upfront. Michigan-based Image One Corp., who is in direct competition with Office Depot and Staples, has been able to boost its revenue by 30% by making, and sticking to, guarantees and by providing incredible Brand experiences. Image One promises great service and illustrates this to the customer by adopting a "four hours or its free" service guarantee.

The small Image One Brand has been able to compete with the big guys because they make guarantees they can truly deliver on, and in those instances when something does go wrong, they already have a process in place to provide satisfaction. Image One assures their customers a positive Brand experience every time, which has resulted in loyal consumers who know who to turn to for office solutions in the future.

So, providing an easy-to-use and convenient complaint center, personally following up with a disgruntled consumer, or making a guarantee and sticking to it, are all ways a Brand can apologize for their mistakes. Whether it's a Louis Vuitton paperweight, a restaurant gift certificate from Houstons, a bouquet from Nordstroms, or a complimentary jewelry repair from John Hardy, many Brands are realizing that, to make consumers loyal ones, you have to say "you're sorry" when you make a mistake.

Because, as we all know, an apology, a gift, and a promise that you'll never screw up again can make a world of a difference. And it will strengthen your Brand image – 100% guarantee!