

From The Field/ Branding & Communications

• Boost Your High-Level Brand: Be Superfluous

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Too much of a good thing is the expression that comes to mind when we think about something that is superfluous. But if yours is a high value brand — one that is high touch and high quality — you can leverage a superfluous level of service to support your brand’s narrative.

We’re starting to see a lot of this happen in the retail industry. Major players are recognizing that a small percentage of their customers make up most of their luxury business. Consultants Bain & Co. tracked the number of affluent shoppers from roughly 90 million consumers in 1995 to see it triple to 330 million consumers over the last two decades.

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS:

- *Some brands are developing superfluous services that go beyond what luxury shoppers want.*
- *By adding a superfluous level of service, the brand’s rising tide floats the rest of its dedicated followers.*
- *If you add more colorful elements to your brand’s story, you can generate a conversation that can build the brand.*

Their findings estimate the segment will grow by 10 million consumers a year. And as a group, they spend about \$300 billion a year. That’s why some retailers are turning to exclusive experiences to reinforce the relationships their clients have with their brand.

But even within this segment, brands like Holt Renfrew and Barneys New York are developing superfluous services that go beyond what these luxury shoppers want. Instead, they are designed to appeal to an even more select group, one for which the value of an exclusive service far outweighs any real or perceived cost.

In fact, price doesn’t figure into the equation in any significant way because this is about how the customer feels. Research conducted by TMG International Inc. in 2014 found that organizations that developed “superfluous” offerings did not consider the cost of these offerings until they were developed. Cost was simply not part of the product or service definition.

By adding a superfluous level of service, the brand’s rising tide floats the rest of its dedicated followers.

Here are three aspects to consider if you want to add a superfluous service to your brand’s story:

The Superfluous Can Build Conversions

Brands that have been around for a while have a story. Part of it is rooted in the history—where it came from and who started it—but the story is also based on the conversations people are having about it today. If you add more colorful elements to your brand’s story, you can generate a conversation that can build the brand.

Boost Your High-Level Brand: Be Superfluous *(continued)*

For example, Four Seasons is easily recognized as a luxury brand hotel. But did you know there's a Four Seasons jet that offers a 24-day global expedition that includes a safari through the Serengeti, a dive with a marine biologist in the Maldives, and a private dinner on The Great Wall? All for \$132,000 per couple.

Of course that service is going to have a limited market, but it's also something very few brands in the hospitality space can do. And as a guest of a Four Seasons hotel, at whatever level, you become associated with the exclusivity of that brand, even if you are not directly using the superfluous level of service.

Don't Start By Trying To Make A Business Case For It

A superfluous level of service comes from big thinking. And the over-the-top service stories it generates--whether real or perceived--can make your brand's narrative come alive and turn your followers into devotees. But it won't make sense from an ROI perspective right away. When you set out to create this new level of high-value service, you can't be daunted by the cost. You have to focus on how valuable this will be to the brand and how it supports the high-value customer, who is already supporting the brand.

Barneys New York has a private shopping apartment that is reserved and staffed for exclusive clientele. It doesn't have to be cost-justified when celebrities like Beyonce can book the space and spend upwards of \$250,000 on a single visit.

Make Sure The Quality Is There From The Start

You can't just start adding superfluous levels of service. The quality of your service has to be perceived to be higher.

This perception of value is driven by the quality and price where a high-value offering is expected to offer a higher quality than the competition. And it is usually premium priced. For this reason, price does enter into it--to some degree. But it is more as a means of driving the perception of higher quality rather than being able to deliver on a specific price-value equation.

Strictly defined, what is superfluous is more than what is needed. But from a brand perspective, it can be a level of service excess that allows it to transcend luxury. That's when it moves into the realm of exclusivity. So while it can look like a level of service beyond what anyone might reasonably need, the ensuing brand equity this builds is something every marketer surely wants.

About John Bardawill

John Bardawill is the founder and managing director of TMG International, a marketing and sales consulting firm that develops and executes customer-focused strategies to drive profitability. John leverages his 25 years of international marketing and management experience to help clients translate marketing, customer experience, and change initiatives into meaningful action across their organizations.