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10 QUESTIONS WITH...

Dan Day

This author and marketing whiz wants to bring your brand to life—through your employees.

1) MinnesotaBusiness Magazine: Your new book is called *Brandtender Marketing*. What do you mean by the term?

Dan Day: A “brandtender” is an employee who is aligned to your brand and can effectively tender its value proposition to the marketplace. Brandtender Marketing is a trademarked approach that takes your brand to market via employees.

2) MNB: You contend there is no such thing as customer loyalty. Can you explain that? **DD:** It’s difficult to gain loyalty in our culture—the divorce rate’s over 50 percent, right? Yet we expect customers to be loyal? We have to be loyal to them! “Loyalty marketing” builds affinity to points and promos, not the brand. Would you rather have a pleasant flying experience or earn miles that you tear your hair out trying to redeem?

3) MNB: Lots of business owners are going around today picking up the proverbial coins off the shop floor or looking for new revenue streams. Why do you suggest looking no further than a company’s workforce for unrealized value? **DD:** What separates one brand from its competitors, regardless of industry, is that no two businesses have the exact same blend of individual styles, generations and cultures spread amongst their employee popula-

BIZ BRIEFING

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tion. This unique mix is the DNA of a brand, an “unduplicatable differentiation” that can be leveraged to strengthen connections with customers.

4) MNB: An “engaged workforce” sounds good and all that, but does it add to the bottom line? DD: Yes, when that engagement is mobilized to drive marketing efforts. As an example, ask a McDonald’s executive how much the phrase, “Would you like fries with that?” has added to its bottom line through the years.

5) MNB: We have forever heard lines such as the customer is always right and that companies strive to excel in the area of customer service. Do you have a slightly different concept of that? DD: Customer service is vital, but reactive. We have a proactive, marketing-minded approach to customer engagement. After making purchases from a company recently, I received a phone call from “R.J.” pleasantly asking what else he could do for me. Now that’s direct marketing. Your people are your brand, so you position them in your marketing efforts. Then, you can start to quantify ROI.

6) MNB: Name three things the best brands do well. DD: The brands that will survive this wobbly economy: 1) Help employees understand and become aligned to their brand. 2) Teach employees how to communicate the brand message effectively. 3) Empower employees to represent their brand in the marketplaces they serve, making every “moment of impression” with a customer a strong one.

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7) MNB: What doesn’t a brand do? DD: A brand doesn’t get built by marketing and then hurled toward customers over the heads of employees. A brand doesn’t get faked through a cool logo with a punchy tagline. A brand doesn’t come to life on its own—it’s not a thing—but rather through connections between employees and customers. You can’t design your way around offering poor customer experiences.

8) MNB: Briefly outline your Brandtender Marketing process. DD: You know that huge gap between strategy and tactics? We close it, through an implementable process that begins with helping companies see through the eyes of customers. Then we align employees to the brand message, introduce marketing to HR—I’m amazed at how little interaction there typically is between the two, when both are critical to the brand!—and segment employees just like you’d do customers. We connect employees to customers, the centerpiece of Brandtender Marketing, then measure and sustain what we’ve started.

9) MNB: Name a few local companies that you think really get this concept. DD: Have you seen the latest Best Buy TV spots? They feature real, live employees talking about their experiences helping customers. “It’s our people, not the stuff,” says Best Buy’s Barry Judge. Also, Fastenal, of Winona, was one of the last companies we heard about being impacted by the downturn and it remains strong. Founder and chairman Bob Kierlin will tell you flat-out: “Your people are your company.” These are just two Minnesota companies bringing their brands to life—through employees.

10) MNB: How is your book selling? DD: Thanks for asking! It is selling beyond expectation, but my real joy comes from putting concepts into action. Rolling up our agency’s collective sleeves to help companies mobilize their marketing army—their employees—is the challenge that jolts me from bed every morning! —DG