

WHAT'S YOUR BRAND'S EMPATHY QUOTIENT?

By: Andrea Syverson

Poet Maya Angelou wrote that “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” The same can be said about brands. Do you know how your brand makes your customers feel?

Brands befriend their customers by showing compassion in big and not-so-big ways. Their empathy quotients are put to practice in numerous actions...always with their customers' best interests front and center. Let's look at a few BrandAbout™ examples:



REPUBLIC OF TEA

It is quite apparent that the world does not revolve around left handed people or tea drinkers. I am amazed at how many fine restaurants and hotels show total disregard for the tea drinker all the while going overboard to accommodate the coffee drinker. I have found it nearly impossible to find a cup of high quality decaf black tea to accompany my dessert in the evening. I have resorted to bringing my own tea bags with me and simply asking for a steaming cup of hot water. Luckily, the folks at Republic of Tea empathize

with this tea drinker's dilemma and created the perfect creative solution for just these situations. Their Traveler's Tea tins are small and compact and fit in almost any evening bag or briefcase. They easily hold 6 round teabags and are refillable. The “Ministers of Sipware” at Republic of Tea have thought through their customers' needs in every aspect of the tea experience and are poised to accommodate those needs. They clearly state that they are “committed to taking care of our customers in a kind, respectful, and compassionate way and to building long-term, mutually rewarding relationships with our suppliers, customers, communities, and each other.” Brands that befriend their customers present compassionate product solutions.

SPANX

Most women have a love/hate relationship with pantyhose. Sara Blakely was no exception. Founder of the beloved shapewear company Spanx, Blakely befriended women across the country when she invented a whole new category of undergarments by cutting out the feet of her pantyhose in order to look better in her off-white pants many years ago. “I never dreamed visible panty lines and uncomfortable thongs would inspire me to become an inventor.” This female entrepreneur turned an everyday problem into a \$300 million business venture simply by having compassion first for her, then for women everywhere. Blakely continues to listen to her customers' gripes and present ever more

empathetic solutions to their problems. One of her newest inventions, the Bra-llelujah, was designed to eliminate back fat and visible bra lines. Spanx gets their customers issues!

SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

SherwinWilliams is another company that commiserates with its customers. While their goal is to sell paint, and hopefully lots of it, they really only want to sell customers the exact color that will delight them. They know this is best accomplished through trial and error and SherwinWilliams' branding strategy is to be a low-risk, compassionate partner in that process. With Color-To-Go paint samples, customers can buy small amounts for test painting. Their Color Visualizer allows customers to upload their own home images and try various paint colors on the screen. By befriending their customers and assisting them in all the various paint decision pain points, SherwinWilliams differentiates itself amongst its competitors.

The screenshot shows the Sherwin-Williams Color Visualizer website. The top navigation bar includes the Sherwin-Williams logo, a search bar, and links for "Upload your photo", "Interior Scenes", "Exterior Scenes", and "Explore Colors". Below the navigation bar, there are links for "Log in/Register", "Favorite Colors", "Favorite Scenes", "Download Scene", "Email", and "Print". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column has a "Get Started!" section with the text "Use your own pictures or start with one of ours." Below this is an "Upload a photo" section with a "View the demo" link and an "Upload your photo" button. There is also a "Photo Requirements" link. Below that is a "Choose a scene" section with two columns of scene categories: "Interior scenes" (Bathroom, Bedroom, Dining Room, Living Room, Kitchen) and "Exterior scenes" (Arts & Crafts, Colonial, French Country, Ranch, Spanish Revival, Victorian). There are also buttons for "My uploaded interiors" and "My uploaded exteriors". At the bottom of the left column is a "Today's Colors" section with the text "Take cues from the hues of the past to paint the way to the future in our newest color collection." and an "Explore Today's Colors" button. The right column features a large heading "Your photos. Our colors." with a sub-heading "Welcome to a smarter way to paint—no paintbrush required. Upload a photo of your room and quickly explore hundreds of colors. It's free. It's simple. It's smart." Below this is an "UPLOAD YOUR PHOTO" button and a "Photo requirements" link. There is an image of a camera displaying a room photo, with several other photos scattered around it. Below the image is a section titled "Here's how it works..." with a numbered list: "1 Upload a photo" with the sub-text "First, take a photo of the room you wish to paint and upload it here." Below the list are three buttons: "1.UPLOAD A PHOTO", "2.PREPARE YOUR PHOTO", and "3.PAINT".

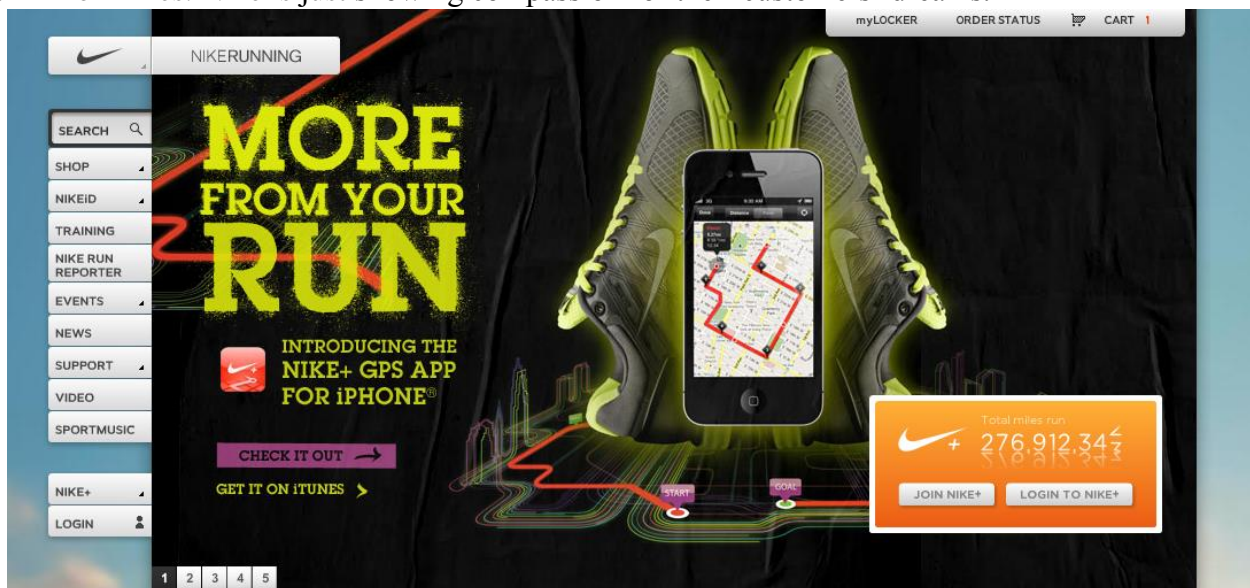
CHINABERRY

As a parent, Ann Ruethling, cofounder of children's book company, Chinaberry, was "disturbed by the lack of caring and respect expressed in many of the children's books she found at the library for her daughter Elizabeth." She then set out on a mission to find positive and uplifting books. This is how she explains what happened next: "Much work went into that little project of mine. I subscribed to numerous children's literature publications and scouted out as many libraries as I could. I started keeping notes on index cards about the books I liked and at what age I wanted to introduce Elizabeth to each book. By the time my stack of index cards was three or four inches high, I began to realize how much time and energy

had gone into this mission of mine. And I realized there were probably a lot of other concerned parents who could greatly benefit from my stack of 3x5's. I felt that if parents could just feed all those wonderful books into the hearts and minds of their children, the world would have to become a better place. Thus, Chinaberry was conceived - at first as a free service, and then as a catalog business to make it easier for parents to buy the books I was telling them about.” Nearly 30 years later, Chinaberry continues to show compassion for children, for other busy parents and for its desire to make the whole world a better place through its meaningful offerings.

NIKE

Despite the carefreeness of its tagline, Nike knows there is nothing easy for its customers when it comes to “just doing it.” Nike knows that having goals and supportive friends makes “just doing it” even more do-able. By creating Nike Plus, a running community, and SportBand, a device to track runs, this brand lends its supportive services as a complement to its running shoes. Perhaps that is why *Brandweek* declared Nike Plus the digital campaign of the decade. “Nike Plus takes “Just Do It” and actually helps runners get it done. Nike Plus is credited with powering Nike's gains in the running shoe category. NikePlus.com now has more than 2 million members, according to the company, who have tallied over 250 million miles. Nike is just showing compassion for their customers’ dreams.





BEST BUY


Electronics category leader Best Buy is a befriending brand that shows compassion in a different way. They know that every time they sell a new device, the customer probably has one she'll need to get rid of. Best Buy wants to make every aspect of the buying/selling/tossing process easy. CEO Brian Dunn had this to say in *Fortune*: “We’re transitioning from being just a mover of boxes. We want to help customers get better use of technology, whether they are buying, installing, fixing, or disposing of their hardware.” Here’s how they advertise it on their website: “You trust us when it's time to buy the latest electronics. You can also trust us to help you safely dispose of your old ones. In fact, many of your broken, obsolete, or unwanted gadgets are just waiting to be e-incarnated. So bring them to us. And we'll

make sure they're properly and safely recycled, so they have the chance to perhaps come back as something even cooler in the future. It's all part of our Greener Together™ program. And we'll take just about anything electronic, including TVs, DVD players, computer monitors, cell phones and more. You can bring in up to two items a day, per household, and most things are absolutely free. So do it for the Earth. Do it to get rid of some old junk. Or just do it for some good Karma.”

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No matter where you bought it, we'll recycle it

You trust us when it's time to buy the latest electronics. You can also trust us to help you safely dispose of your old ones.

Regardless of where you bought it, what brand it is, or how old it is: bring it to us. We'll make sure it's properly and safely recycled. It's all part of our Greener Together™ program.

And we'll take just about anything electronic, including TVs, DVD players, computer monitors, audio and video cables, cell phones, and more. Most things are recycled absolutely free, with a few restrictions.

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[Best Buy recycling standards](#)

Best Buy’s empathy for the practical post-purchase aspects their customers have to deal with wins them support. In an interview with Best Buy’s CMO, Barry Judge, *Brandweek* reported that: “The concept of customer service 3.0 is to go where the conversation is happening. Our people can help before, during and after the sale. We’re a chain of a lot of people who are dedicated to that mission. Our strategy is to communicate that our people are the difference. We’re accessible. You can reach us through the web, store social media and we’d like to help before and after the sales.” Brands that befriend their customers know that compassion is a ‘round the clock job...pre-sale, during the sale and post sale.

Your brand’s EQ is one of your critical competitive differentiators. Pay attention to how your brand makes your customers feel. They’ll notice and remember!

Andrea Syverson is the founder and president of IER Partners, which has guided and strengthened brands of all sizes with savvy best practices for creating customers for life. Combining her passion of adventurous listening and working across diverse industries, her “outsider-insider” creative branding and merchandising expertise and objectivity has been valued by companies as diverse as Ben & Jerry’s, Celestial Seasonings, CHEFS, Boston Proper, SmartPak, Spanx and World Vision. She holds an MBA and has dedicated more than 20 years to providing clients both domestic and international with innovative approaches to branding, product development and creative messaging. She is the author of two books in which she shares her hands-on approach for both brand building and creating customer-centric products that enhance brands: *ThinkAbout: 77 Creative Prompts for Innovators*, and *BrandAbout: A Seriously Playful Approach for Passionate Brand-Builders and Merchants*.