



## STOP THAT! A Checklist of Brand Sabotaging Behaviors to Halt!

By: Andrea Syverson

As a merchandising and branding strategist, I abide by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen's profound axiom: "A product has a job to do for your customer." In addition, I remind my clients that their products (or services) either *enhance* their brand or *detract* from it.

Right now, I am in the midst of finishing my upcoming book: *ThinkAbout: 77 Creative Prompts for Your Merchandising Muse* and am living in a verb-saturated world contemplating all the ways a multitude of products and services from a vast collection of industries live up to Christensen's advice. Just how well do these individual products/services that surround us all day every day in stores, on tablets, on phones actually support, amplify and play to their brands' promises? It's a provocative question to ponder for your own brand.

I am swimming in examples of positive product role models. Products and services that go to work for their brands each and every day astonishing and befriending and compelling and sparkling and validating and welcoming. It has been a fun and fruitful journey of discovering product developers and service providers who go the extra mile to both woo and wow their customers. It is also a reminder of the rigor it takes to turn brands into Lovemarks. (You may remember that it was Saatchi & Saatchi CEO Kevin Roberts who coined this term. It is simply defined this way: "Lovemarks are brands that reach your heart as well as your mind, creating an intimate, emotional connection that you just can't live without. Ever.")

Well, in the researching of my book, a strange thing happened. I became pestered by examples of products that do just the opposite. Products and services that stop short of living their brand promises, that disappoint their customers in some way, that leave one with a dull sense of boredom from the brand experience. Exactly the *opposite* of Lovemark creation. You know the kind of products I am talking about...they annoy, they complicate, they frustrate or even exasperate you. I purposefully am choosing not to name names here but I do encourage you to make a list of the products and services you experience in your own life that simply let you down...in big or small ways and look at that list carefully for learning lessons for your own brand.

Why does this happen? I am certain it is unintentional. In all my years of merchandising, I've never known a merchant to start out making a subpar product offering, yet it happens all the time. Perhaps any number of marketplace factors might be at play:

- busy brand ambassadors charging ahead too quickly
- short term thinking
- not taking time to listen to your customers
- organizational strife
- unwise cost containment pressures
- not thoroughly evaluating the competition for meaningful, opportunistic gaps
- lack of internal communication and/or collaboration...silo battles
- forgetting to do post-mortems and taking the time to observe, clarify & integrate the learning lessons
- and, perhaps, the very lack of a purpose-driven strategy from the get go!

These reasons all create an unnecessary obstacle course for your product lines. Having to maneuver and jump over too many of these hurdles sets up a series of nuanced product/service diminishment that ultimately weaken your brand.

So how can we stop these brand sabotaging behaviors? I'd like to suggest one simple first step. Compile a "STOP DOING" checklist. Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, taught me about the power of "Stop Doing" lists. Collins advocates clearly articulating what you *don't* want to be spending your resources on (your time, energy and dollars) as a way to clarify and perfect what you *do* want to be investing in. It's wise advice for all areas of life. I'd like to bring his concept into the discipline of product development and take it just a step further.

### **THE A-Z LIST of STOP THAT! BEHAVIORS**



As I researched hundreds of products and services, I came up with my own ever-growing A-Z list of verbs that counteract Christensen's wise business acumen. Here's an edited version. Why not take this checklist into your next brand meeting and spend time looking objectively at your product/service offering through the eyes of your customer. See if you can't identify some of these destructive behaviors that unintentionally might have slipped into your own product development process and course correct before your products reach your customers!

#### **ADDLE**

Have an outsider look at your product...is there anything that is at all confusing about it that would keep a customer from making a buying decision about it?

## **BOMBARD**

Are all the line extensions really necessary and are they filling a real purpose? (Think potato chip aisle in the grocery store: Are all the options carrying their weight/earning their shelf space - chips with ruffles, ridges, salt, vinegar, bar-be-que, jalapeño, salt and pepper, plain?)

## **COMPLICATE**

Have you allowed any “feature creep” to occur?

## **DISAPPOINT**

Did your “pushing the envelope” of product innovation stop too soon?

## **EXAGGERATE**

What about your product have you oversold?

## **FRUSTRATE**

Are all instructions/product copy crystal clear?

## **GRAPPLE**

Imagine your product listed on a search/placed on a shelf next to your top two competitors... will your customers see it as the hands down winner or are you giving them reasons to ponder?

## **HINDER**

What is keeping your customers from fully experiencing all your product has to offer?

## **INCONVENIENCE**

Have you fully appreciated your customers’ time and attention when designing this product?

## **JAM**

Think about this: Your customer is in a jam and is quickly running into the store and in need of your product (think paper towels: Brawny vs Bounty vs generic store brand)...did you create yours to be the one she pulls off the shelf intuitively?

## **KILL**

Nobel Prize winner and writer William Faulkner challenged writers “to kill your darlings” meaning sentences they were not very objective about. That’s also good advice for product developers at times.

What are your blind spots in relation to this product?

## **LULL**

What about this product makes your customers want to nod off? Banish boredom!

## **MISUNDERSTAND**

As the product developer, do you somehow have to add commentary *in person* to make something better known about this product? How will you fix this?

## **NEGLECT**

What’s missing that is crucial?

## **OVERWHELM**

What is just too much?

### **PUZZLE**

Have you solved your customers' decision-making dilemmas? Think eggs...if you are Egglard's Best, are you clearly selling the benefits of your egg over the customers other two choices – the higher priced organic option or the cheaper store brand version?

### **QUESTION**

What about your product raises doubt in the minds of your customers?

### **RECONSIDER**

What if you could wave the magic product development wand and change one thing? What would it be?

### **SUBTRACT**

For cost cutting reasons, if you had to eliminate one thing about this product, what would you delete?

### **TRIVIALIZE**

Have you minimized any of your customers' concerns about this product?

### **UNDERWHELM**

Have you left your customers with a compelling story to tell about this product?

### **VIOLATE**

Did you overstep your customers' perceived price/value/quality wallet connection for this product?

### **WAFFLE**

Are you and your company fully standing behind this product?

### **EXACERBATE**

Anything at all irritating or annoying in some small way about this product?

### **YAWN**

Have you missed any opportunity to create a LOVEMARK?

### **ZIG or ZAG**

Did your competitors go in one of these directions? Have you taken the road less travelled or is this a "me-too" product?

No doubt, you have more verbs and questions to add to your own list. So do I. But go ahead and use this as your ThinkAbout springboard and get started now. Stop those brand sabotaging behaviors before your customers stop buying from you!

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*.