



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## STRIVE FOR COGNITIVE RESONANCE

Cognitive dissonance is not good for your business. It can disrupt a sale or trigger customer dissatisfaction. We need to acknowledge the possibility of cognitive dissonance and take action to avoid it. However, if we want to bolster the impact of our marketing, we need to go beyond merely avoiding cognitive dissonance and strive for cognitive resonance.

*resonance - a quality of evoking a (favorable) response*

I define cognitive resonance as *delighting target-customers by reinforcing and exceeding their expectations of perceived value and anticipated performance of their choice*. It results in a feeling that the target-customer is making/has made a terrific choice, creates brand loyalty, and gives birth to evangelists for your brand of product or service.

What might we do to achieve cognitive resonance? Here are a few thoughts for your consideration:

- **Select an appropriate target customer:** The target customer whom we are most likely to gain loyalty is one, in the words of executive coach, Simon Sinek, who believes what we believe—our brand idea. The brand idea—theme for the brand positioning strategy—resonates within these customers. This also requires that we avoid broadening the target customer too much or too quickly in a futile attempt to meet unrealistic target sales goals. Overextending targeting brings customers in from the fringes who are not appropriate candidates—at least at the time, for our brands. It sets the stage for creating dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth. In practice, it may gain short term sales, but it will undermine customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Deliver on the customer experience:** We need to get beyond the product we sell and deliver on the customer experience. This requires the development of intangibles our target customers value, such as special financing and terms. Whatever it takes to help the target customer feel more comfortable with the purchase. Intangibles are not physical aspects of the product but complement it, serving to deliver a rewarding customer experience. It also includes operational practices such as allowing for returns, servicing, providing extended warranties or, perhaps, better yet, guarantees, among others.
- **Prepare for and address objections:** Objections are not something to be feared and avoided but welcomed. They provide valuable feedback as to potential issues the target customer has with your brand offering. Conduct beta testing, schedule field visits to share concepts with

target customers, and dialogue with sales personnel to surface potential objectives. Explore alternate ways to address those objections, not just with words that enlighten but through action that delivers on expectations. It could lead to making meaningful changes in the product, conducting additional clinical studies and finding extrinsic reason-why support (e.g., JD Powers award for performance) to overcome objections in a way that affirms your customer's decision to purchase.

- ***Don't launch before you're ready:*** I've seen too many launches where product and resource issues have not been adequately addressed, triggering customer dissatisfaction. These issues include poor quality control, insufficient training (quality or numbers to enable reaching goals) of sales personnel and/or customers, backorders, and inadequate staffing that results in disappointing and frustrating target customers. This all comes down to delivering on all of your promises. Keep in mind the maxim, that we only get one chance to make a first impression. Make it a good one!
- ***Accentuate the positive:*** The late Bing Crosby crooned,

*You've got to accentuate (ac-cent-tchu-ate) the positive  
Eliminate the negative  
Latch on to the affirmative  
Don't mess with Mister In-Between  
You've got to spread joy up to the maximum  
Bring gloom down to the minimum  
Have faith or pandemonium  
Liable to walk upon the scene*

Hahaha, this is my lighthearted call to advise us not to abandon the target customer after the sale is made but find ways to reaffirm their purchase decision through frequent, meaningful follow-up. Let your customers know what a wise choice they've made in purchasing your brand. Like the earlier point on handling objections, don't just let them know in word alone but through your actions. Do what it takes to help them feel it.

I'd be interested in any practices you employ that generate cognitive resonance. Please share them with me.

*Richard Czerniawski*



**Richard D. Czerniawski**

430 Abbotsford Road

Kenilworth, IL 60043

847-256-8820

847-312-8822

[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com)

[www.bdn-intl.com](http://www.bdn-intl.com)