

## ***To Change or Not to Change...Isn't That A Brand Question?***

*By Suzanne Tulien, Principal and Co-founder of The Brand Ascension Group*

**I have been thinking a lot lately, being it a new year, about how business brands go about evolving their brand into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond and yet remain true to their core values and style.** Doing so, in our opinion, is critical to gain and sustain the trust of your market. There are good arguments to change if it is in the name of evolution (not just for change itself) and some good arguments to remain the same brand all of your customers know and love.

As long as the brand (business) is strategic, deliberate and conscious of the changes they want to make and HOW they can be related to the core values and style of the brand – there can be powerful, positive outcomes that continue to sustain not only the growth, but sustain and GROW its customer base. Here is an example of a change in technology a brand now offers, yet not much of a change in the behavior of the brand or its customers. So I had to ask myself, why the change? What were the costs, and how is it affecting the overall desired goal (if any)?

The other day I was out running errands and one of my stops was at the post office. I pulled up and noticed a lot of other cars in the parking lot and dreaded a long wait in line – I have been pre-disposed to believe this to be the case 90% of the time I go there. I parked the car, grabbed my package and headed inside and...of course, I was right! Ha! (that's another long topic of discussion, isn't it??).

As I began mentally submitting to standing in a long line (at least 15 others ahead of me), I noticed not one, but two of the automated postal kiosks (one in the outside lobby and one inside right next to the long line of patrons.) Both kiosks were line-free! I was stumped. Where they "out of order", did one of the clerks announce that they weren't for public use? Hmmmm, so I decided that my time was valuable and that I was going to excuse myself through the line all the way to the front desk of clerks where this kiosk was parked. Yes, the "Welcome" digital screen was lit and ready to take my order. Staying focused as I keyed in my

package's zip and size information, I felt 15 pairs of eyes curiously watching me slide my credit card in and out of the slot and complete my request to mail my package through a machine. And finally, within 60 seconds of starting the process, I pulled the self-adhesive, digitally printed stamp out of the slot the kiosk spit out and adhered it to my package. Proudly, I placed the package on a stack of others next to one of the clerk's desks and 'excused' my way back through the line (that had only moved one person ahead) without looking anyone in the eye...(was that shame?).

I'm curious. Could all of those people in line need a service that was not offered through the kiosk? O.K., let's say ½ of the customers in line did, that still left 7.5 people who chose to wait in line (15-25 min.) instead of:

- 1) exploring a new concept in postal services
- 2) learn a new skill, or
- 3) trust a machine to get their package to its destination

It is curious, isn't it? In this day and age where technology and automation is taking over our service systems, what is it that keeps the average 'Joe' from embarking on something new? Something that would increase the amount of time you had to do something other than go to the post office? Was it the fact that they would have to step out of the line they had already invested 5 minutes to risk losing their spot and then having to trust the kiosk would fulfill their needs? Or could it have been 'peer pressure' since no one else was attempting to use it, then it must not be the 'thing to do' or even "I don't want to look stupid if I cannot figure it out!"

And should I be surprised that as soon as I left the kiosk someone finally broke out of the middle of the line and proceeded to the kiosk to accomplish exactly what I had? (I bet they just couldn't stand being ignorant of this new protocol anymore!)

Let's just for a moment, pretend that the U.S. Postal Service decided to reinvent their brand. They hire The Brand Ascension Group to facilitate them through our Brand DNA program. From this powerful methodology and exercises they decide that one of their brand "STYLE" attributes will become "Educational." And they define "Educational" in their own way as: "Awareness of opportunities to educate our customers on our products and services to enrich their decision making, save time and reduce their postal expenses."

So, I bet you are wondering how they could use this singular attribute to create a behavior that would help them live and embody it? How, better yet, would it

alleviate the long lines and the 'predisposed' notion their customers have of the postal 'service delivery?'

Well, based on the scenario outlined above, I am going to take a stab at it. Now, what would happen if occasionally, when the postal line was obviously long (let's say 5 people or more), one of the clerks notified another in the back (this could be automated too, with a buzzer or a flashing light in the back room) to come to the front. Once the clerk arrives to the front, he makes a friendly announcement to encourage some of those in line to get familiar with the automated kiosks. He assures them that he is an expert and can save them many minutes in line – he would be their personal kiosk trainer.

*"Once you are trained, you'll never go back to standing in line again!"* he says with a smile on his face.

Yes, I am now one of the 'freed' postal customers, no longer subject to long lines, who took a chance and was curious enough to see how this new kiosk could help save time and frustration in my life. I now have a new perception and expectation of the postal service.

With this tiny bit of brand consciousness the United States Postal Service could begin to positively, deliberately and strategically change the perception of their customers and feel good about doing it. Perception – that's all it is. As business owners, we have the ability to manage the perception of our employees and customers, why aren't we doing it more consciously, deliberately and strategically?

**To Change or Not to Change** – who of your customers will take the initiative to break their long-standing habits to achieve better things?

- 1) How do you go about introducing a new product or service and get your customers familiar and comfortable with it?
- 2) Is one of your STYLE attributes focused on the EDUCATION of your customers or something comparable?
- 3) How do you go about showing them that YOU ARE THE EXPERT and YOU ARE HERE TO HELP?
- 4) How are YOU the CATALYST for change and evolution within your business brand?
- 5) What does your brand stand for and HOW are you EXEMPLIFYING it to your employees and customers?

Branding isn't hard, nor does it have to be expensive. Mostly, all it costs you is commitment, awareness and action in your behaviors that exemplify your authentic

brand consistently, relevantly, and distinctively. But branding starts INTERNALLY, not as a marketing campaign. When entrepreneurs dedicate time to define, create and build their brands, the payoff is limitless!

## **About the author:**



*Suzanne Tulien is Principal and Co-Founder of the Brand Ascension Group, LLC. She is brand consultant, award-winning graphic designer, a certified trainer and certified in Accelerated Learning Methodologies. She is author of [The 6 Myths of Branding](#), and co-author of [Megapreneur](#). She regularly writes article on branding for entrepreneurs. She is available to train and consult with mid-level growing organizations. [Suzanne@BrandAscension.com](mailto:Suzanne@BrandAscension.com), 719.265.1707.*

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