

In this series of Supermarket & Retailer's articles, we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams. We give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven company in the world.

Aki Kalliatakis

aki@leadershiplaunchpad.co.za

www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za

Every year in August we go to Umhlanga timeshare for our holiday. We own two weeks at the resort, but even so we pay quite a bit in annual levies and extra meals to be there. It's not a five star hotel, but we love it anyway. Every year we get the same room on the same floor, are happy to see the same familiar people there (both staff and guests), eat at the same places, and get involved in the same family activities. I swear, even the questions in poolside the 'family quiz' are the same that they were last year – and I always win a bottle of wine!

Now you may be thinkin, "Hey Aki. Aren't you the guy that's always talking about innovation and uniqueness? Aren't you always writing about how our products and services have always got to



“ Hey Aki. Aren't you the guy that's always talking about innovation and uniqueness? How our products and services have always got to be improved, with new ideas to add value for customers? ”

But does a consistently similar customer experience, repeated over and over again, sometimes lead to customer loyalty?

be improved, and how we need to constantly and creatively come up with new ideas to add value for customers?" Yes, of course, I still believe in that.

In a competitive market, we always need to ensure that we are distinct and differentiated from our rivals. We need to be aware that sometimes customers get a bit bored, and that's why we have expressions like, "A change is as good as a holiday." And you certainly don't want to be seen as 'vanilla' giving the same humdrum service and products that are unavoidable.

But does a consistently similar customer experience, repeated over and over again, sometimes lead to customer loyalty?

With the carpet pulled out from under our feet in the past couple of years by the 'new normal', I'd suggest that we sometimes yearn for that certain comfort in the familiarity and consistency of experiences that are predictable. I go on holiday to timeshare with my family every year precisely because I want the same experience I've had many times before – no surprises.

There is confidence in knowing what to expect – and getting it. The experience is unsurprisingly anticipated. The stay at timeshare works for us because the product does what it is supposed to do. If it didn't, we have a choice of thousands of other family-friendly resorts in our beautiful country, and they will probably lose us as a customer.

A study conducted by Marco Costa, of the University of Bologna, and reported in the Harvard Business Review of September 2011, confirmed something which you and I have probably observed hundreds of times. But it also sparked an idea that could improve the customer experience and our customers' loyalty. Costa's study indicated that 66% of students observed in lecture halls over a six week period chose the same seat, or an adjacent one, every time.

The study, titled *Territorial Behaviour in Public Settings*, suggests that restaurants and hotels could boost satisfaction by giving repeat customers the same table or room on each visit. From an employee experience perspective, the study suggests that companies could reduce worker anxiety by holding recurring meetings in the same conference room.

It struck me that this is what explains the apparent paradox in my thinking about innovation versus predictability. There are no hard and fast rules for customer care and loyalty. Rather, it is about understanding the real needs of the customer, and then creating a predictable customer experience through products and service. If they



“ With the carpet pulled out from under our feet in the past couple of years by the 'new normal', we sometimes yearn for that certain comfort in the familiarity and consistency of experiences that are predictable – to slow down and have no surprises. ”

want innovation – think about the early innovators and customers that buy Apple products, or people who get a kick from trying new technology regularly – then by all means give them something new. But remember that the early adopters are a very small percentage of your customers.

For most of the rest of your customers, don't underestimate the fact that they sometimes want the experience they had last time.

The new science of behavioural economics, which won the Nobel Prize in Economics for Daniel Kahneman, and superbly demonstrated in his book

Thinking Fast and Slow, has proven that, as much as we sometimes seek variety as human beings, we are most comfortable with day-to-day decisions that don't require us to burn brain calories. Think about how an unanticipated traffic jam can cause you so much misery and spoil your day. Or how, by moving certain products to a different aisle upsets customers irrationally.

Kahneman stated that as human beings we sometimes have to take slower, more deliberate, rational and logical decisions, but this takes time and effort. We simply don't have enough time,

nor do we want to exert more effort into making these decisions every day. Mostly, we want to not even think about things that happen to us. We want to just get on with it without exhausting ourselves, and that is where consistency plays a role.

Your job is to first repeat the tangible or physical part of the experience, and try to appeal to all of the customer's senses. A repeat of the physical layout, putting the customer at the table they are familiar with – a memorable smell, a familiar type of music in the background. All of these are tangible and add a big layer of consistency. Then try to repeat the more difficult emotional part of the experience.



We work very hard to create a great customer experience. Customers like consistency. They like

what they are used to. They like what they have positively experienced in the past, and tend to want a repeat experience.

So, what do you need to do consistently, over and over, that will build a positive and predictable tangible experience for your customers? And what innovations and changes can you introduce that will still make them feel safe and not needing to waste mental energy to figure out? **SR**



Aki Kalliatakis is the managing partner of The Leadership LaunchPad, a company dedicated to helping clients become more customer driven. He can be contacted at (011) 640 3958, or via the website at www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za




GRAIN FIELD
CHICKENS

Click here to visit our website and like us on Facebook.

