When I was about 11 years of age my parents bought their “Mom & Pop” store. As we lived over the store, I constantly saw my parents working. Occasionally, I was lucky enough to be able to help out. It was during one of those times that my Father took me aside and explained what Customer Relationship Management was all about. Of course, he did not know what CRM was as we know it today; but he intuitively knew exactly what it was. He told me the following:

“Son you have to treat all of our customers equally”. He then paused and added: “It’s just that some customers are more equal than others”.

He realized what we all know today that the 80/20 rule works, insomuch as 80% of our business usually comes from 20% of our customers. It’s with this knowledge that we are able to positively affect our bottom line by ensuring that our “A” customers receive more attention than our “B” customers and so on.

But CRM or “Customers Really Matter” as I prefer to call it, also gives us the ability to create some longer term planning as it relates to our sales team and the relationships that we are, or should be, constantly working on. For instance, if we have recognized our A-B-C & D customers we can plan our sales strategy a year in advance and ensure that the right customers get the correct amount of attention.

Let’s start with our “A” Customers. Depending on the size of your client list, let’s say they get a visit on the 1st of the month by the sales person. In addition, they get a bi-annual visit by the President of the company and the Vice President sees them at least 3 times a year. In addition, they might get weekly faxes, e-mails etc and of course they will be on or will be invited to be part of your “Customer Council”. (By the way if you would like my White Paper on “How to Create a Customer Council” just e-mail me at info@jacksims.com).

“B” Customers will get an annual visit by the President and Bi-Annual visits by the Vice President of Sales. The Salesperson will make quarterly visits and will send e-mails and promotional communications on a Monthly Basis, plus a copy of the company newsletter.

“C” Customers will get an Annual visit by the Vice President of Sales and sales calls twice a year, plus faxes, the company newsletter and e-mails.

“D” Customers will get an annual sales call and all of the electronic communications that the company creates.

You see, once you have planned out how the sales force will spend their time it can be programmed with the clients a full 12 months in advance. The customers will know, ahead of time when they will be seen so they can plan on it too. The sales force can literally decide, with each client what day of the month they will be seen. This then makes it easy for both sides to get the full benefit of this planned event. Clients can be prepared with their commentary and the sales person can be ready to cover any issues that have come up in the period since their last meeting.

As a management tool, this is invaluable as it ensures that the best clients are getting the best attention. But it also has the benefit that if, for example if a salesperson quits, the monthly appointments are still in place with the client and the new person can slot right in without skipping a beat!

People Brand

There are, of course, many reasons for wanting to stay in touch with your best customers on a regular basis; but the primary one is that you want it to be part of an on-going brand building program which, of course, means building
relationships between people. Brand building is crucial if you want to separate your company from the pack. Most businesses compete in a category and your brand can be the big differentiator within that category which enables customers to leverage their preference at the moment of truth; the point of purchase! I just mentioned at the beginning of this article that all customers should not be treated equally. And you should also know that people are probably the single biggest asset you have in your company, because people do business with people!

Also, people are not the same and should not be treated the same either. I am not saying that some are better than others, but that people are different, and should be treated accordingly. You see, if you are in management, your employees should not be expected to adapt to what you want, but rather you should adapt to their style so they can thrive in their working atmosphere, which creates a win-win situation in the work environment. For management, clients and employees, people are productive when they are happy and clients pick up on that positive energy.

Many years ago I hired a guy who in all honesty really rubbed me the wrong way. I thought that I was nuts at the time, but later I made him one of the first Vice Presidents of the company. Why? Because he made me look at things differently. He pushed the proverbial envelope and made everyone around him think differently too. Because of him, we developed the habit of putting an empty chair at the conference table when we were discussing brand strategy for our clients. The empty chair represented the customer and was a reminder that they had an equal say in whatever brand strategy we were working on.

In my speaking sessions I use the example that has been developed by David Keirsey, called the “Keirsey Temperament Sorter”. Keirsey created a program that recognizes that there are 4 different types of people. Following this concept, we should acknowledge and adapt accordingly to how we treat our employees and our customers. You see people want to do business with like-minded people. If you can tell what “type” of person your customer is and adapt to their style, the way they conduct themselves etc you will have a better chance of success.

The thing is: your people are your brand. Every single person in your company represents the brand in some way shape or form and you have to make sure that they are delivering the brand message exactly the way that you want it delivered. The easiest way to do this is by creating a “Brand Commitment Statement” which is NOT a “Mission Statement”. They are very different things. A "Mission Statement" is created to impress someone: usually a banker who you are looking to secure a loan from, or someone that the company wants to impress for financial gain. On the other hand, a “Brand Commitment Statement” is all about your customers. It is what your brand is committed to doing in the best interest of your customers. I believe that understanding and being able to quote the “Brand Commitment Statement” should be incorporated in training potential employees and all existing staff members.

This leads me into the hiring process! If you have attended one of my seminars where we get into the “people aspect of business” you already have heard me say the following: “Hiring is a process, not an act”. If you want to get the very best people in your organization then you have to act like a headhunter and be constantly collecting a whole host of resumes of potential employees that you may want in your company. Keep them on file for that time when you have grown and have more jobs to fill. So the day someone quits and you need to get someone better to fill their position, you have a candidate available. You have to be constantly trying to “up the quality” of personnel. I can promise that this is an on-going process. To quote Nike: “there is no finish line”, when it comes to getting quality personnel.

**Service is a component of your brand!**

Branding is made of many different components. It ranges from all of the promotional communications including advertising, web sites, media, brochures, literature, yellow pages, direct response, PR and more. Branding is every person in the company, the product and of course customer service. To be clear, we really have to understand what branding is so we can apply it to what we do everyday in our business. The following is an accurate description of what a brand is. It can apply to a product, a corporation or even a person, (yes, individuals are brands too):

“Your unique promise of value that results in a positive collection of perceptions
An causes an expectation in the mind of your customers”™

I suggest that you look at the component parts of the quote above and think carefully about the following points:
1. **Uniqueness** – What makes you unique? What separates you from the pack? What makes you different? What have you done to deliver the best customer service?

2. **Promise** – are you keeping your promises? Because most companies do not! This is a great chance to leapfrog over the competition! Follow through on all promises made; otherwise you can lose credibility in your customer’s eyes.

3. **Value** – what value are you delivering with your customer service that people will go out of their way and pay a premium price to do business with you? Remember: “Price is what you pay, value is what you get”.

4. **Positive collection of perceptions** – everything that you use to communicate with your target or potential target audience should be congruent with your brand strategy. Remember “Perception is reality in the customers mind. Consistency is the key component to having your customers recognize your image instantly which causes a lasting impression in their minds.

5. **The net result is that it will cause an expectation of your brand, they just will expect the quality and value that you have promised.**

6. **Finally you have to make sure that you get a piece of “The Customers Mind” – you need to get a bigger share of your customer’s mind and you do that by delivering “consistent and multiple quality impressions over time” in addition to the best customer service possible.

I mentioned earlier that individual people are brands. Of course you all know the individual megastars like Madonna, J-Lo, Tiger and even Elvis, 30 years after his death, he is still a major brand. But you and I are too! And if you want to be upwardly mobile within your organization make sure that you think about the 6 branding points as they relate to you. For instance, what makes you special within your company? What separates you from the rest? The chances are it’s not what you went to school for. It is probably one of the four Keirsey Temperament traits. Which you get if you send me an e-mail by clicking here.

If you would like to learn more about branding and growing your business I would like to invite you to go to my web site [www.jacksims.com](http://www.jacksims.com) and sign up for my BRAND NEWS letter. While you are there, you can see the back issues by clicking on the Articles & Press section and scroll down to BRAND NEWS.

**JACK SIMS** – founded 2 nationally ranked companies on 2 continents, his second became the largest marketing and promotion agency in America. Clients have included A&W, Polaroid, British Airways, Lipton, General Foods, General Electric, Lever, Burger King and many more. Now he uses his 30 years of practical experience of attaining sustainable business growth by consulting as a business growth expert and speaking for some of the greatest brands in the world. Companies like Harley-Davidson, Novartis, LexisNexis, Washington Group International and associations that span nearly every category of business have all had Jack as their keynote speaker.

**Speaking topics include:**
Most Marketing Stinks, Growing your business into a Big Brand and 10 Traits of Leadership. You can book Jack to speak at your next corporate or association meeting or Convention at 914 509 5170 or info@jacksims.com

**Books:**
Growing small businesses into Big Brands and You can’t see your Backswing – How to Win at Business & Golf” are available at: [www.jacksims.com](http://www.jacksims.com)

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