



A New Look at Customer Experience

By R.M. (Erik) Gordon

A DOZEN BOOKS CLAIM that customer experiences are more important than tangible attributes of products. Starbucks' ability to sell coffee that is merely good, for prices that are outstanding, is the latest evidence that the books may be right.

Clued In, by a well-known practitioner of experiential marketing, Lou Carbone, is yet another of those books, but you'll find some parts particularly useful if you (1) are new to marketing and haven't read prior books, (2) have read the books but need help dealing with operations and product development people who know nothing about experiential marketing, or (3) need guidance on how to actually implement experiential marketing ideas.

Skip the first four or five chapters if you have read prior books, but they will be useful if you're not familiar with prior literature or want to quickly introduce your operations or product development colleagues to it. To the author's credit, he cites other pioneers such as Len Berry, Joe Pine, Jim Gilmore, Gerald Zaltman, and John Deighton so you can find some of the classics in their original form—a courtesy often overlooked in practitioner-oriented books.

Clued In makes several claims. First, customer service is not the same as customer experience. This is intuitive to marketers but not to operations people whose view of interactions with customers often focuses on systems and metrics such as the number of seconds spent waiting on line.

Second, Carbone wants you to focus on subconscious phenomena, not just on conscious rational matters. He says you should identify the specific emotions customers want to feel as a result of their experience with your offering.

Third, Carbone wants you to think in terms of clues that influence customers' emotional responses and systems that produce those clues. The devil is in the details, and in the system, too. One of the best-known clues is the toilet paper triangle in your hotel bathroom. The triangle is a clue that someone has tended to your bathroom (at least to the extent of

Clued In: How to Keep Customers Coming Back Again and Again

by Lewis P. Carbone

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making the triangle). *Clued In* is the first book to show photographs of toilet paper treatments ranging from the simple triangle to origami works of toilet paper art. A good clue does not always get better with size or elaboration.

Carbone explains how successful marketers like the Walt Disney Co. and the Progressive group of insurance companies use systems to deliver consistent clues. Systems that produce and support experience clues are not the same as process improvement systems loved by operations people. Getting better at doing something that is of little relevance to the customer experience may result in a process improvement that industrial engineers or cost accountants applaud while customers yawn.

To produce "wow" experiences, we should start with the end in mind. Start with the customers' needs and desires, then design a system of clues that move your customers to an end state in which those needs and desires have been fulfilled.

Clued In is different. It takes advantage of the author's long experience in consulting to provide useful insights into the challenges and tasks of customer experience management, along with a practical approach to systematically producing desirable customer experiences. ■

About the Author

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