

# branded customer service and sales

A BUSINESS BLOGLETTER PRODUCED BY TACK-USA AND TMI US

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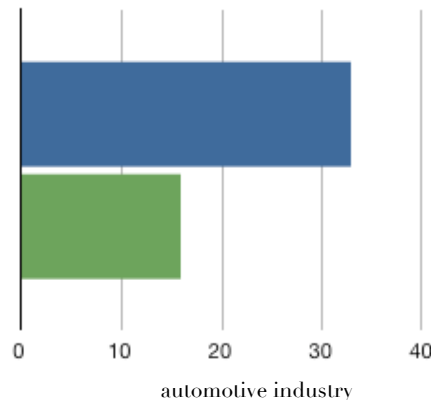
## Welcome to our inaugural blogletter

We firmly believe in feedback. We are, after all, the company that has propagated the concept of *A Complaint Is a Gift*. We consider this blogletter as a work in progress. Where we start today may not be where we end up. But we are committed to brevity and information that is useful, so useful that you'll hopefully want to share it with others. It's hard to do, but we limited out advertising to our name and web addresses! Please let us know how we are doing.



### CREATE AN ALIGNED EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH YOUR SALES APPROACH AND YOUR SERVICE DELIVERY

Studies that measure customer satisfaction as it is achieved during sales or during service reveal that customers feel a lot more satisfied when receiving service than they do when being sold.

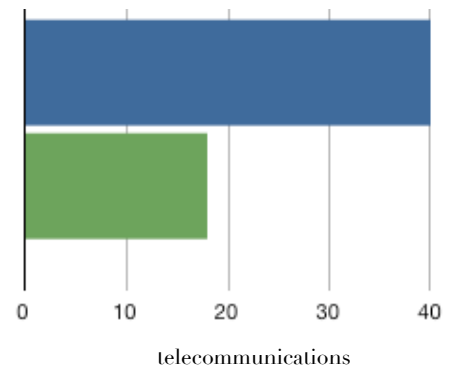


For example, consider the automotive industry, (above) where customer service is ranked twice as high in contributing to customer service. We've heard customers say they would rather have a root canal than go through the trauma of buying a car.

But what about telecommunications? Most of us don't think of getting a new cell phone as something horrible, and most of us don't like having to call about service.

Telecommunications companies seem to have a unique capacity to set up tortuous phone menus before enabling a customer to talk with a live human.

Yet, the numbers for telecommunications are very similar to the automotive industry. In the chart below, you can see that customer service in telecommunications contribute to more than twice as much satisfaction as sales.



These types of studies abound, reveal the same data, and are surprising. You'd think that having to get service after a sale would more likely be unpleasant, because after-service sales typically are about problems. Purchasing, on the other hand, results in acquiring something that most people find a rather pleasant experience.

So, what's going on here? We believe there are a number of contributing factors. We'll be exploring this idea over the next few months. So, you'll have to come back for the full story but it definitely relates to aligning both your sales and service under the same brand promise!

## IN THIS ISSUE

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If your brand is your face and promise to the public, and you work to deliver it through your service, why not stretch your brand concept so it covers your sales operation as well?

### 2. A NEW SPIN ON OBJECTIONS

Bob Branson takes on the topic of how objections and complaints may be one and the same. If this is the case, sales people can probably learn something from service staff who handle complaints.

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OPINION THIS ISSUE BY JANELLE BARLOW



## CLOSING THE DEAL — OBJECTIONS OR COMPLAINTS?

Most professional sales people want to be considered as valued consultants in the eyes of their customers. In fact, it drives them crazy when they're not seen this way. Consider these two situations:

Situation 1: You have been invited to make a sales presentation or submit an RFP.

You make a proposal to a customer and you get objections. Many sales professionals expect that and are prepared, maybe even armed. They reach into their bag of skills that they learned during their sales training or through years of experience, and answer the objections, one after another. If they don't get the deal, they wonder why. After all, they handled the objections skillfully.

Situation 2: You have been retained as a paid consultant.

You did your research and are making the presentation, outlining your recommendations. The customer is dutifully taking notes and asking questions. They ask questions because they need clarification to the next steps or think about how they can execute your suggestions.

**In Situation 1, you get what we call in sales — objections. In Situation 2, you get feedback that in service is called a complaint. What's the difference?**

Really, there is no difference between Situation 1 and Situation 2 in terms of customer feedback. In both cases you sought to be a consultant and provide a solution to the customer. In both cases, evaluating and implementing the solution will cost the customer time and money. In both cases, they are relying on your expertise and research to augment theirs.

The difference is in how the “salesperson” responds and how the “paid consultant” responds.

Here is an example. Your company manufactures LCD touch screens. A Florida kiosk company's procurement department requests an RFP for weatherproof touch screens. Procurement included water proof, windproof, and low temperature capable. Because it's Florida and you know who your customer provides kiosks to, you made sure they were humidity proof as well. However, the customer, who it turns out is selling the kiosks to a new customer in Alaska, is disappointed with your proposal.

Procurement didn't communicate that the kiosks would be installed in Alaska and had to withstand -50<sup>0</sup> temperatures. They just indicated “low temperature capable.” Engineering could have modified your proposed screens for an additional cost, but you didn't know that was required — because you didn't ask. You had Florida on your mind.

Your customer has waited anxiously for your proposal so they could serve their new customer. Your proposal doesn't meet their requirements. Realistically, your customer, the kiosk manufacturer, doesn't have an objection to your proposal, they have a complaint. You just let them down

and wasted their time. A little more investigation on your part and you would have provided them with a solution to meet their customers' needs. If your competitor did its homework, they'll get the deal at a higher price and become the trusted advisor.

If you agree that, as a paid consultant, the customer's objections to your solution are the equivalent of a complaint, then might it also be a good idea to see the objections you get as a sales consultant complaints also? After all, the customer invested time and resources to hear your solutions and is preparing to pay even more to get them.

Now, let's take that a step further. If you start considering the objections you get after a sales presentation as complaints, you will be much more prepared to deal with them. Janelle Barlow, PhD., CEO of TACK-USA coauthored the bestselling book *A Complaint Is a Gift*. One main idea in the book is that many people won't complain. They'll simply go to another supplier, especially if another vendor looks like it knows what they need. When customers complain, it is a gift. They are telling you what you need to do in order to get their business and keep it.

Once you realize that an objection during a sales presentation is actually a complaint, you'll probably deal with it differently. The complaint becomes a very real issue that needs to be addressed and, more importantly, something that needs to be anticipated ahead of time so it doesn't happen. We have accustomed ourselves to think objections are routine and a natural part of the sales process. However, you wouldn't think complaints about your performance as a paid consultant as routine. In fact, you'd anticipate problems and do everything to avoid them.

When you start looking at objections as complaints you will realize that, as *A Complaint Is a Gift* reveals, most people won't give you the real reasons they are dissatisfied. In many situations, you'll get a smoke screen and never know what the real issue is. You must do everything possible, as would a paid consultant to make sure your solution addresses the customer's needs the first time, to avoid the dissatisfaction that accompanies a complaint. That is best accomplished by thoroughly researching your customer's business and understanding their needs before you present your solution.

Of course, no matter how well you prepare, occasional complaints are unavoidable. When they do happen, treat them as you would a complaint. Treat them as gifts. When they complain, customers are telling you what it takes to keep them. This is no time for a sales come back, an objection-handling session, no matter how well crafted.

Rather, it is a real opportunity to **thank the customer** for bringing this to your attention. **Yes, say thank you!** It demonstrates that you appreciate that opportunity to address the issue and that you are grateful the customer is giving you this chance.

An objection is a complaint and complaints, if we are lucky enough to hear them, are gifts.

Bob Branson, President, TACK-USA



# Q&A

## Judge people by their questions rather than by their answers.

Voltaire

You can judge us by our answers if you like, but these questions are — without question — stupendous!

***We've heard you say that training doesn't work. In fact, it's stated quite plainly on one of your brochures. What do you mean by this? Please explain.***

It's certainly a provocative statement, isn't it. It also, unfortunately, happens to have a lot of truth behind it. A recent study by a major sales training company suggests that within a matter of a few weeks, 85% of the material covered is forgotten, misplaced, or nothing happens. Learning is not implemented. And who knows what specific 15% is retained or influences behavior change.

We're determined to address this issue, particularly as it impacts the TACK sales training side of our business. We're creating an e-learning package about our basic sales course, and we've loaded it up with concrete practice. With our live training programs, we have started a new process called Directed Practice. It involves 3 months of on-line practice and coaching.

Delegates are asked to make videotapes practicing the key elements they identified in the course as being most relevant to their sales improvement. The videotapes are uploaded to our partner's web site, and then expert coaches provide feedback. So far, the feedback has been tremendous.

We're working very hard at this. We've made implementation a key value of our brand position as we integrate two distinct training and consulting companies: TMI US and TACK USA. We want our efforts to have impact, and we're going to take a stand on implementation.

***Your topic is branding sales and service. How does sales compensation affect how sales people sell their brand?***

Your question speaks to one of the key variables as to why salespeople don't always deliver their brand when selling. For example, let's say that your brand promises something about getting the customer into the right product. But when the sales person comes along, they push for sales that are clearly not right for the customer.

We mystery shopped a Hong Kong financial services company. The executives of the company absolutely swear that they are committed to getting customers into the right financial products. We asked one of their sales people (without their knowledge that we were mystery

shopping them) to help us with some insurance instruments for our staff. You might have thought we were in two universes, with our needs being quite specific and the sales person pushing something that absolutely would not meet our needs. When we pointed this out, the salesman said, "But I was told to push this product by my manager." He actually used those very words.

When we told the executives about this, they were horribly embarrassed. We actually run into this a lot. We don't know whether their embarrassment is that we found them out, or that they actually didn't have a clue that this is what happens when their sales people have a so-called Moment of Truth with their customers.

You know the interesting thing about this situation is that this financial services company has a product that would have worked well for us. If we hadn't been mystery shopping them and reporting back to them, they would never have known what happened — why we said no to their salesman. Instead, they would have merely experienced a customer who called for an appointment and information (that's a lot of motivation and such a customer should be able to be closed) and then ended up saying no. Without knowing precisely what happened, this company is receiving misinformation. They'd have to wonder why this sale couldn't be closed with such high customer motivation. They might wonder if their products are appropriate, when actually it's not listening to customers that is the problem. And that not listening was encouraged by the manager telling the sales staff to push products that they wanted to sell (for whatever reason, such as higher margins) rather than living up to the company's brand promise of meeting customer's needs. And that push may have been coming from the senior team.

***Is it is easy to brand your sales and service? Why shouldn't it be easier than it seems to be?***

Okay, it's really your second question that is relevant here. You seem to know that it's not easy. And indeed, it's not, especially if you have been operating for some time. It's easier if you are a start up and are committed to doing this. The reason why it's not easier than you might expect is because of the huge number of variables, the large number of people from the same organization who are sometimes operating in competition with each other. One thing we will definitely tell you, whether hard or easy, it's definitely worthwhile to do it.



# TippyIdeas



**Don't beg your customers for business.** Rather work to attract them. When you're in sales, begging is never pretty. You may think you never do this, but it happens much more frequently than you might imagine. This is especially true in today's turbulent economy. Some people are desperate for a sale, and they don't mind pulling out all stops when it looks like a sale won't be made. "Please, just please, give me a chance. My boss said he would fire me if I didn't make a sale today." A better approach is to ask what you can specifically do to increase the amount of attractiveness to your customers. If you are desperate for a sale, can you position your situation as a strength so it looks like a strength — instead of begging?



**Read the whole book** says one of our delegates. The day this person moved beyond transactional sales to selling total solutions was the day he learned to read a book. So, how do you read a book? Of course, from chapter one through to the last chapter! Problem was, this salesperson was just reading one chapter of his customer's book; the chapter where he wanted to sell a product or solution. When he learned that he needed to read the customer's entire book starting with chapter one, essentially understanding their entire business cycle, he reports being amazed at the different parts of their business his company could participate in. It didn't matter where or when he read that book, but as sure as the sun comes out every day, he realized that he needed to read the whole book. That was the day this salesperson started selling total solutions to his customers, in areas of their business he didn't even know existed.



**Get on the horn!** Absolutely return calls or other communication from your customers the same day you receive them. If you had a choice, from who would you buy? What happens to your confidence when service people return your calls within 24 hours? What do you think about a sales or service person who returns calls the same day, or the one who waits until tomorrow or even later?

Responding quickly seems like an obvious tip and this is certainly not the first time it's been mentioned. It just doesn't happen all the time, or even enough of the time for most customers to identify it as a major problem for them. Google "telephone calls, how quickly returned," and you'll get 35,200,000 hits. That's how big an issue it is. Stand out. Differentiate yourself.



# IMHO... Janelle Barlow

## Branded political campaign

Some of you may have noticed that many branding concepts are showing up all over the place. We've used the language of on-brand and off-brand for over a decade now, and variations of those terms are heard everywhere.

So, this morning I wasn't surprised to hear a discussion about Sarah Palin's new book, *Going Rogue*. The news announcers were talking about whether Sarah was scripted during the 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign and whether this was a good or bad idea. They asked the question; was Sarah on-message or off-message.

This on and off language is very easy conceptually to understand. We've certainly found that once a group of employees understand what the brand promise is they are promoting, they can readily determine whether they are on- or off-brand.

Hey! This language is so sticky that I've put it on my license plate here in Nevada. So, if you ever see my "on-brand" car, honk.

But I digress. I just completed David Plouffe's book, *The Audacity to Win*. For those of you who aren't consumed by politics the way I am, Plouffe was Obama's national campaign manager for both the primary season and the general election.

Plouffe provides the back story about the "inside story" of an election that can be understood better when marketing and branding ideas are applied.

Here's one example. Plouffe writes: "Campaigns are no different than any other organization — they are collections of human beings. The clarity of the mission and the culture of the group may not outweigh strategy and

resources in determining eventual success, but they're awfully close."

I'd recommend the book, and if you don't have time for that, go to one of our web sites ([www.tmius.com](http://www.tmius.com) or [www.tack-usa.com](http://www.tack-usa.com)) to our white paper section and you can download my complete analysis of the campaign in branding terms.

If you closely followed the election season 2008, there may have been times when you wondered why the Obama team made some of the decisions they did. You may not agree with all those decisions, but with Plouffe's explanation you'll understand why. Plouffe's behind the scenes story helps explain why the campaign stayed with their strategy and ignored the media and political pundits — as much as the media can be ignored in a political campaign.

Ultimately it all boils down to one thing. Build a culture that is strategically defined early on, and then live that culture and trust that you made right choices. Tweak your choices, but don't alter course mid stream. And if you still lose, at least you were true to your own vision.

It's not easy to take a position like this — particularly in politics. It's also not easy in business. Political strategists are watching polls, reading blogs, watching the television pundits. Business people are watching sales figures, customer satisfaction scores, staff turnover, etc.

Plouffe would be the first to tell you that he was consumed by the data their campaign was constantly generating. But this data helped them choose the tactics they employed — it didn't redefine their strategy on a weekly basis.

IMHO... any strong brand absolutely follows this approach, whether the organization — or campaign — knows it or not.

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