



Marketing Lessons from Walt

By Drew McLellan



MCLELLAN MARKETING GROUP

Where strategy and passion collide



Marketing lessons from Walt



While vacationing with my family at Walt Disney World, I decided that I was going to capture some of the marketing genius that I believe began with Walt's passion and has now grown into one of the world's most powerful brands.

I have long believed that Walt Disney's genius was not animation or theme park design, but in truly understanding the human heart. Somehow, in the midst of ROI, measurability, counting clicks and studies that can track a person's eye movements to see what part of an ad captures their attention first - we have forgotten that marketing and branding is ultimately about wooing and winning someone's heart.

Walt got that. I like to think that on some days, I get it too.

This series originally appeared on my blog, Drew's Marketing Minute. I hope you'll stop by and share in the conversation. In the meantime, please enjoy the heart-winning inspirations of Walt.

Surprise (Marketing lessons from Walt)



We're all familiar with the golden oldie - the giveaway. Typically, we ask customers to sign up to win or create some sort of contest. And then they wait to see if they won. And in most cases, probably forgot they even signed up.

To tie in with their yearlong theme, "The Year of a Million Dreams," Disney has added a brilliant twist to the age-old favorite. They've added surprise.

Here's their twist. "Imagine walking through one of the Walt Disney World Theme Parks when a Cast Member taps you on the shoulder to offer you a dream come true. Right now, over a million extra-special dreams, some thought impossible, are being randomly awarded to people just like you."

It goes on to list prizes that range from not having to stand in a single line all day (more valuable than you can imagine) to traveling around the world, touring all of the Disney parks.

No little pieces of paper for your name and phone number. No essay contest. You just win because you're there. At that very moment.

Wow.

Surprise is a story-inspiring emotion. It demands to be shared. How could you add one of Walt's favorite elements - surprise - to your marketing mix?

Privilege (Marketing lessons from Walt)



I witnessed an amazing sales lesson today. I watched the Red Raider Band from Uniontown, Pennsylvania proudly march in the Magic Kingdom's parade. I am sure for some, it was the highlight of their band career to date. But let's look at what happened, from a sales perspective.

- The buyer (the school) contacted the seller (Disney) unsolicited and asked to buy.
- The seller said "Maybe, but prove your worth."
- The buyer sent in an audition tape and application to Disney officials.
- The buyer received an acceptance letter and ticket order form in return.
- The buyers (students) paid for their own airfare, Disney lodging, and entrance into the theme parks.
- The buyers helped Disney provide entertainment to their guests.
- The buyer bought Disney t-shirts, sweatshirts, ears and other items to commemorate their trip.
- The buyer no doubt also brought family and friends...who also stayed on Disney property, bought Disney tickets (have to cam cord the performance!) and Disney souvenirs.

And I doubt they only stayed for the day of the performance. Was that a cash register cha- ching I just heard? And they were thrilled to be the buyer. They'd do it again if they could. (The Rose Bowl and many other events handle band appearances like this too, by the way.)

Think only Disney can turn buying into a privilege? How about Harley Davidson? How about the consultant who only takes on two new clients a year? Of course, the bigger question is this. How can you turn some aspect of doing business with you into a privilege that your potential consumers would pay a premium to have and be thrilled to do so? (Don't underestimate that part of it. If they aren't thrilled to do it, then you're just too expensive.)

Details, Details (Marketing lessons from Walt)



The moment you cross onto Disney property, the magic begins. Yes, there are billboards touting the newest attractions. Sure, you might catch a glimpse of one of the signature structures like Epcot's giant ball or Cinderella's castle at the Magic Kingdom, but really it starts with their traffic signs.

Yup, traffic signs. We all know what they look like, right? Not Disney's. You know you have crossed the threshold when you see signs like the one to the right.

The purple signs with mouse ear directional arrows are Disney's way of signaling that a remarkable experience lies ahead. An experience where the attention to detail will delight and surprise you. Could they have used the standard street signs? Sure. But there was nothing special in doing it that way.

How do you signal your clients that something special is about to happen? That you and your company are extraordinary? What happens in your meetings or on your website or when your phone is answered that promises delights to come? Or are you just using the standard street signs?

Evolve (Marketing lessons from Walt)



When Walt originally conceived Disneyland and Walt Disney World, his vision was to create a place where entire families, from toddler to grandparent, could enjoy the attractions together. No health warnings, no height requirements. And so they were built.

Fast forward to today, where the Rockin' Roller Coaster is one of the most popular attractions at WDW. This roller coaster is not for the faint of heart. You go from 0-60 mph in 2.8 seconds and right into an upside down loop. I can only imagine what Walt is thinking.

But then again, Walt was about as savvy a marketer as you can find. So he is probably nodding his head and recognizing that strong brands must evolve with the times, the consumer, and the competition. Had Disney executives clung to Walt's vision without taking new realities into account, I'm not sure the theme parks would have survived for the past several decades.

Today's Disney is a blend of Walt's original family friendly vision and a modern amusement park. The brand has evolved and thrived.

When was the last time you did a reality check on your own organization's brand? Are you stuck in a vision of the past? Is it time for an evolution?

Listen and Respond (Marketing lessons from Walt)



For many families, a trip to Disneyland or Walt Disney World is a once in a lifetime experience. Kids dream for years before they finally get to step into the Magic Kingdom. So the expectations are incredibly high. This can't just be a fun vacation. This needs to be the uber vacation.

One of Disney's habits that has helped launch and maintain their brand's success is that they listen and respond to what they hear. It's not uncommon to get stopped by a survey taker in one of the theme parks.

Here's an example. Kids arrive at Disney World with one goal. Meet Mickey Mouse. It's their core reason for making the journey. They have dreamed of that moment for years. It used to be that it was left to chance. If a child happened to be in a particular spot in the Magic Kingdom, when Mickey was there signing autographs then the child's dream was fulfilled. But, if the fates didn't align, the child was likely to go home having seen Mickey in the parade but never being able to hug or interact with the Big M himself.

Parents shared this insight with Disney officials and ToonTown was created. A whole new land, where you can tour Mickey and Minnie's homes and, no matter what else is going on in the park – meet Mickey. Mickey now waits for his fans, young and old, to come visit him in ToonTown. Today, no child has to leave their uber vacation without a Mouse encounter. Cue the happy music.

When was the last time you asked your customers what they wanted or needed from you? How did you let them know that you heard them? Never asked? What's stopping you?

(Serving as models are my young-at-heart dad and beautiful daughter)

Set Expectations (Marketing lessons from Walt)



Human nature dictates that we are much more comfortable with the known. While surprises are nice if they're fun-filled, no one likes a nasty surprise, like a rush charge or an extra long wait for a product or service delivery. The folks at Disney understand that human truth. So they set expectations for their guests.

At the front of every attraction there is a sign that tells you the current wait time. (Night photography is not my forte!) You make an informed decision – is Space Mountain worth a 90-minute wait? Is Big Thunder Mountain enough fun to stand in line for 45 minutes? Customers don't mind boundaries or consequences if they know in advance what they are. I'll bet it won't surprise you to learn that if there's a 20 minute wait posted at a Disney attraction, the real wait time is more like 10-15 minutes. Set expectations and when possible – exceed them.

Do you set your clients' expectations? Billing, delivery times, levels of service, your availability, etc.? How do you do that? Conversation? A New Client handbook? A contract?

How you set them is a communications choice. But setting them is just smart business.

(Clearly I should not quit my day job and go into night photography!)

Dance with the one that brought you (Marketing lessons from Walt)



Most organizations expend 95% of their marketing efforts chasing after potential business. Once a client is in the door, it's onto the next. Chalk up the win and go after the next big fish in the pond, right?

Not so fast my friend. It's your current clients who keep your doors open. And are the most likely to give you new opportunities and sales. Disney understands while its great to get new faces into their theme parks, they need to reward those most loyal guests as well. One way they do this is by extending park hours to those guests who are staying in a Disney owned resort.

With a special wrist band, Disney resort guests can enjoy the most popular rides and attractions without long lines. There's an air of exclusivity at being able to wave your wrist band and stay to play another few hours. It sure makes us glad we're staying where we are.

How do you reward your current clients? How do you make them feel special and valued? Are you sure they know about the little extras you give them? Don't be so sure. It may not be a wrist band...but be sure you find a way to reward your good clients and make sure they know they're appreciated.

Knock down the barriers (Marketing lessons from Walt)



On the road to every sale there are barriers. It might be price, or timing or who knows what. A smart marketer removes as many of the barriers as they can anticipate. Disney is a master at this. Throughout their theme parks, there are shops. Lots and lots of shops. You can buy anything from t-shirts to works of art and just about everything in between. Hauling those packages around with you all day is a pain. And could deter many a purchase. But never fear...Disney has lots of options.

- You can have the packages delivered right to your Disney resort
- You can have the packages shipped home
- You can have your packages sent to the front of the park and pick up your treasures on the way out
- You can rent a locker and put your packages there
- You can take one of the business cards, jot down the item number and call later to order it

What barriers keep your customers from buying? What have you done to remove them? Do your customers know?

Drew McLellan

Top Dog, McLellan Marketing Group

Drew McLellan has not only survived 20 years in the advertising and marketing arena, he's thrived in it. After working for several other agencies, including Young and Rubicam's CMF&Z, Drew created McLellan Marketing Group in 1995. At MMG, strategy and passion collide as they bring their unique style and practical smarts to life for their clients small and large. Drew and his talented band of co-workers have developed a proprietary branding process that has helped propel their clients to the top of their game.



Considered a national expert in branding for both for profit companies and the non-profit world, Drew is highly sought after speaker and has given about a zillion presentations at national conferences, key note addresses, training for his peers in the profession, college students and even his daughter's eighth grade class. What's so appealing about Drew that he can reach such a diverse audience? He's a straight shooter who talks about marketing in a way you won't forget. He tells stories, he gives you concrete examples and facts that you can take into the boardroom and most important, he gives you ideas that work. No matter who you are or what your level of expertise.

Over the years, Drew has lent his expertise to clients like Nabisco, IAMS pet foods, Kraft Foods, Meredith Publishing, John Deere, Iowa Health System, Make-A-Wish, University of Central Florida, SkiDoo and a wide array of others. When he's not out preaching the good word of branding, Drew spends time with his daughter and pondering why the Dodgers can't seem to get back to the World Series. He also serves on the Boards of Directors for:

- Variety the Children's Charity, United States
- Variety the Children's Charity, Iowa
- Character Counts in Iowa

Drew has a Master's Degree from the University of Minnesota but alas, he cannot remember their fight song.

Visit Drew's blog at www.drewsmarketingminute.com or McLellan Marketing Group at www.mclellanmarketing.com. You can e-mail Drew @ drew@mclellanmarketing.com.