Fostering a Sense of Purpose in Salespeople
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INSIDER: Culture Built My Brand: The Secret to Winning More Customers through Company Culture
Alexa Mathias, MBA

INSIDER: Your Next Five Moves: Master the Art of Business Strategy
Carson Solley, MBA Candidate
When “Too Much” is Just Too Much
Lisa Beeler, PhD, Alex R. Zablah, PhD, and Adam Rapp, PhD

Brand attachment is defined as the emotional connection a person has to a specific brand. Salespeople are often indoctrinated to love what they sell. After all, if salespeople genuinely love the brand, they will likely put more effort into selling, tell more people about their product, and, in theory, become better salespeople. Yet, this logic may not always be true. A salesperson who “drank the Kool-aid” could be perceived as annoying or pushy; too much enthusiasm from the salesperson may cause the customer to feel pressured and form a tendency to avoid the salesperson and the brand. While brand attachment is important in terms of salesperson effort and performance, it may be equally off-putting for customers.

About the Study

In the focal study, the authors argue that high levels of brand attachment can negatively impact the brand, when considering the customer’s perspective. They explore the direct selling industry, a $35 billion dollar industry, that is known for building strong brand attachment amongst salespeople. In study one, the authors conducted 40 exploratory interviews with 20 salesperson/customer dyads. The answers from these interviews were used to build a survey to test a theoretical dual process model. The survey sample consisted of 98 paired dyads (i.e., salespeople and one of their customers).

The authors propose that salespeople who have a strong positive relationship with a brand will put forth extra effort toward selling the brand, leading to increased current sales. However, they also propose that strong salesperson brand attachment may have a negative effect on a customer if the salesperson appears inauthentic in the act of selling. This negative effect will decrease customer trust and future purchase intentions (likely damaging future sales).

The Findings

The findings confirm that brand attachment can be both helpful and harmful to salesperson success, and this divergence is based on the salesperson’s authenticity. When strongly attached salespeople have low authenticity, they come across as pushy and unbelievable, decreasing customer trust and ultimately customer future purchase intentions. Conversely, a salesperson who is perceived as authentic can be strongly brand attached with no negative consequences (see
Customers of strongly attached salespeople build their brand trust perceptions (and future purchase intentions) on the authenticity of the salespeople, not necessarily the salesperson’s belief in the brand alone. In sum, authenticity is the key to making the sale for strongly brand-attached salespeople.

**Real Estate Implications**

Trust between a buyer and a seller is of the utmost importance in real estate. Clients are often making the biggest investment in their lifetimes, and they must be able to trust both the buyer’s and seller’s agents. Being an overly enthusiastic salesperson can negatively affect trust by calling into question the salesperson’s motives and, hence, whether the salesperson is genuine and authentic. Consequently, the key to maximizing sales results is by being authentic. Customers want agents and firms they can trust, so train and encourage your team to be authentic in order to gain the buyer’s trust.

While brokers and team leaders often emphasize brand attachment, they must also emphasize authenticity with agents. The trust that customers build with a brand through an authentic salesperson can lead to positive referrals, future purchase intentions, and revenue growth. Focusing on the long term and implementing authenticity for the sales team is critical for firm and agent success.

**Recommended Reading**

Reference


About the Authors

Lisa Beeler, PhD
Assistant Professor of Marketing and Sales Innovation Program Director of Student Development, Clemson University
Dr. Lisa Beeler (PhD – University of Tennessee, Knoxville) is a professor, researcher, and consultant who explores how firms and managers can drive sales performance, especially within business-to-business industries. Her research, which often focuses on the critical seller-buyer dyad, has been published in numerous top marketing journals, such as the *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Industrial Marketing Management*, among others. Her research is also shared at both academic and practitioner conferences and has served as the foundation for sales training she conducts across the nation. All of her experience informs the application-based learning approach she uses in her classroom to prepare students to be great salespeople, valuable co-workers, and good citizens.

Alex R. Zablah, PhD
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Dr. Alex R. Zablah’s (PhD – Georgia State University) research seeks to improve understanding of how frontline factors (organizational processes, employees, and technologies) influence the quality of customer-firm exchanges and, ultimately, firm performance. Alex’s research has been published in leading marketing, management, and information systems journals, including the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Information Systems Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, and *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. He currently serves on the editorial review board of six journals, including the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, and *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. Over the years, Alex has received several awards in recognition for his research endeavors, performance in the classroom, and service as a reviewer.

Adam Rapp, PhD
Ralph and Luci Schey Associate Professor in Marketing and Executive Director of The Ralph and Luci Schey Sales Center, Ohio University
Dr. Adam Rapp’s (PhD – University of Connecticut) research examines factors influencing the performance of salespeople, sales teams and sales organizations. He looks at how to improve salesperson performance and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that can contribute to
becoming more effective. In the area of sales leadership, his expertise includes hiring, training, and motivating a sales force and training around how to be more effective operationally as a sales manager. Dr. Rapp has published in the *Journal of Marketing Research, Management Science, Journal of Applied Psychology, International Journal of Research in Marketing, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business Research*, and the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*. His work on sales teams has been highlighted by professional selling textbooks, industry magazines, and presented at Harvard University.

Dr. Rapp is an experienced corporate trainer in sales leadership, team performance, sales competency building, diagnostic selling, and customer relationship management technology. He has presented at premiere institutions including Harvard and Columbia, among others, and taught globally in Belgium, Greece, Colombia, Chile, China, and several other countries. Dr. Rapp also spent two years as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Houston, where he researched and taught in the Sales Excellence Institute. Rapp has won teaching awards at the University of Houston and University of Connecticut, and he most recently won the Neil Rackham Award for Sales Knowledge Dissemination (2014).