

THE GREAT LOYALTY: “FIVE YEARS IN FIVE MINUTES: THE ULTIMATE LOYALTY TEST”



“Trust, once lost, could not be easily found. Not in a year, perhaps not even in a lifetime.” — J.E.B. Spredemann, [An Unforgivable Secret](#)

Loyalty is arguably humanity’s commanding instinct. It is our tribal legacy, where social belonging was required for mere survival. Today, it’s what all brands covet: to be the no-brainer choice of a customer’s System 1 thinking.

That’s why direct-to-consumer apparel brands took off so quickly. You bought a pair of socks once, liked them well enough, and so subscribed to their automatic arrival every two months. *You subscribed to socks.* Welcome to the year 2020, where thinking is optional.

What’s System 1 thinking? It’s what humans do by instinct, habit, or emotion. We walk down supermarket aisles, cell phone in-hand and earbuds firmly lodged, plucking what we normally grab from the shelves without processing the decision. And for obvious reasons, every brand wants to take up permanent residence in our System 1 gray matter.

If there’s a System 1, surely you’d assume there’s a System 2. And you’d be right. System 2 is where we spend tiresome

thought cycles to arrive at even trivial decisions. It’s primarily employed during events requiring swift change, like when your doctor cuts salt from your diet or your better half makes you count calories to lose weight. System 2 investigates, reads labels, challenges preconceived notions, churns options. All of that takes energy, and you might have noticed that humans tend to avoid extra work when possible.

Sure, loyalty is hard to win; once it’s earned though, permanence is hardly guaranteed. Particularly since the advent of eCommerce, consumers have every right to be promiscuous with their brands. And they should be. It’s what keeps the best companies on their A-game while languishing competitors rearrange deck chairs on their own private Titanics.

Marketing has thus indelibly transformed in just two months. In our new reality, many brands face the opportunity to earn, increase, or hemorrhage loyalty. Right now, brand equity’s a fragile commodity (for the lucky ones, anyway). I might prefer an underwear brand, but since its stores

are closed and I need some boxers, I'll take whatever comes up in my Google results with the soonest arrival.

How is your favorite food-delivery provider holding up under increased demand? How well-stocked is your supermarket? If it's sparse, have you tried another? If you have, you've burned laborious brain cycles to make a System 2 decision, and now your go-to supermarket is in severe danger of losing one more customer. Who better to pledge loyalty than the house that feeds you?

I've got two suggestions for messaging strategies during this once-in-a-lifetime chance to drive genuine value for our customers who may be facing unimaginable hardship:

1. Brands that win customers due to outstanding products or services must shout from the hilltops how much they care for their customers—without chest-beating—and how that has manifest itself in hard work on the public's behalf, so they might retain and expand the loyalty they've earned. With everything going on, assuming customers have followed these efforts is a fool's errand. Anymore, safety versus consumption is a 90/10 ratio at best.
2. Brands losing the share battle need to offer a humble apology and make transparent their follow-on strategies to retain customers going forward. To do otherwise risks being sidelined, or worse, flatlined.

Now more than ever, enterprises should commit to a sober sense of their performance against competitors. Without it, they're toast. Assuming they do understand, brands must fashion communication strategies that align with hard realities. What a world this is, where responsible travel brands ask customers to stay home and neighborhood pubs tell us to Facetime happy hours.

The entire globe is united for once in the sincere hope this never occurs again. Meanwhile, we must remember that consequences are real and need to be managed accordingly by the brands upon which customers rely for health, safety, comfort, and happiness.

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