



Advertising May Bring Customers In The Door, But Your Business Image Keeps Them!

By Diana L. Garren

Business image is extremely important to customers deciding where to spend their money. Customers leave for many reasons, however studies show that seventy percent of customers who abandon one company for another report doing so because of the poor attitude exhibited by *your* employees. This is easily avoidable through perception management, which develops and maintains your business image.

In my experience, less than 15 % of businesses know how their business is perceived in the marketplace, or how critical it is to their success, credibility, and longevity. A company's leadership may have a difficult time seeing the image they are currently projecting because they are too close and caught up in the day-to-day operations.

Have you fully developed the image of your business? How others perceive your business will create your company's reality. People (employees, vendors, customers) are seeking your credibility. To establish and maintain it, you must follow your words with action. Your business image will also demonstrate your expertise, trustworthiness, and concern for your customer's and employees welfare.

Your image is your reputation. A good reputation is invaluable. A bad reputation destroys your value. I am talking about real value in dollars and cents. The collapse of Anderson in the wake of the Enron scandal illustrates that loss of reputation can lead to the downfall of your business. There are less extreme examples as well. Texaco is calculated to have lost \$1.1 billion after allegations of discrimination. Motorola is estimated to have lost \$6 billion because links were made between handsets and cancer. A poor image turns off your ideal customers, employees, and investors. Less than ideal employees and a poor internal morale mean high turnover, poor quality, and poor customer service. These factors contribute to higher costs, and fewer orders. A poor image can be a vicious cycle. You must eliminate the inconsistencies that undermine your credibility.

Times have changed. Consumers have more spending options than ever before. Companies who will experience longevity are those who realize their business image is a key performance indicator. They are the companies who take time to develop and measure their business image regularly. They will include managing their image as a link to wider business strategy and planning. Image maintenance helps companies consistently do what they say they will do. It is consistency that brings credibility and credibility that brings longevity.

Diana L. Garren of Atlanta, GA is one of the leading business image experts in the United States. For more information, you may visit TruePerceptions.com. In future issues, Ms. Garren will help your business tackle the many facets of image maintenance.