

Reprinted from the *Democrat & Chronicle*

First Step To Reconcile Perceived, Real Brand Images Is To Admit Being Wrong

August 12, 2007 - Why do so many companies miss the mark when it comes to sustaining customer loyalty and employee morale and productivity?

The answer's simple: Companies fail to reckon with reality. The experiences that customers and employees have with the company don't align with who and what the company says it is.

JetBlue is an example. You'll remember the images early this year of planes stranded on runways. Leaving passengers onboard for upwards of 12 hours without food or drink didn't match the airline's promise of making the flying experience more enjoyable.

Over the years, my company's clients, seeking to narrow the discrepancy between real and perceived brand image and to build more powerful brands, started by doing the unthinkable: They recognized they were wrong.

Being wrong in business nowadays can be the kiss of death. But this admission can also give a company the freedom to be OK with not having all the answers. And it can help a company realize that while it's very hard to change dramatically overnight, it is possible to get better every day.

How can you help your company become better? Start by finding out if perceptions of your brand are in alignment with reality — that is, what your customers and employees actually think.

Your brand is a sum of every experience a customer, employee or other key stakeholder has with your company and its products and services — a sum that customers begin to think of as the promise you make. So, collecting feedback will help you clearly see your brand image, or reputation.

Some questions for customers:

When you think of our company, what's the first word that comes to mind?

If we closed our doors tomorrow, what would you miss most?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate our company as a place to do business?

For questions to ask employees to better understand their perceptions, go to www.brandintegrity.com/truth3.

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