



It's the Experience Stupid!



I remember my first flight on an Air Canada Jumbo Jet. I thought a surprise visit to some friends in Vancouver would be an exciting way to spend New Years and chose to fly the big white and red airline out of Toronto. It was 1974 and I was flush with cash (almost \$350 in travelers cheques after paying my fare). Everything I needed fit nicely into my khaki duffle bag and carry on.

I sensed as I approached the gate that my choice was the right one. In reality, I only had two choices. There was no Westjet; you had CP Air or Air Canada.

Walking down the gangway I felt a little like royalty, everyone smiling at me from behind their crisp white shirts and red ties with matching jackets. All sporting beautiful gold Air Canada lapel pins and the flight attendants or stewardesses as they were know then, were the most beautiful women I had ever seen. I was a celebrity (I imagined) and was politely directed to E1, my blue seat on the starboard side of the plane. Oh, there were three seats but unlike today's sardine cans equipped with a one-size-fits-all shoehorn to wedge you in, they were actually roomy enough to adjust from armrest to armrest with wiggle room to spare.

I was seated next to the window and felt the sun that had decided to grace Toronto with its magnificence on December 29th.

The meal was beef tenderloin and a medley of potatoes with apple crisp for the finish. The silverware, which was better than Mom's, came wrapped in a red linen napkin with a paper ring around it and the plates and cups were real china.

Oh my!

Unfortunately, the service sector has become commoditized. Except for the odd exception like Ritz Hotels, we really can't tell one from the other today. We simply look for the cheapest seat sale and jam our butts between 2 others for 4 hours and act like we're grateful for their mini mixed snack. (What is that stuff?)

Just as I've recanted my first experience with Air Canada circa '74, Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore wrote a book at the millennium speculating that the next economy would hinge on how well businesses could orchestrate memorable events for their customers. Buying decisions are steeped in emotion and emotions are driven in large part by memories. Logic implies that if we can create a memorable experience it will fuel the will to buy TM.

Those that do it well can charge for the "transformation" the experience offers and those that don't, well just look around you.

CEM or customer experience management is the new reality if a business is to differentiate itself today.

I believe that customer experience is the next competitive arena. Innovators will develop an experience-based distinction, which shifts from product features, advantages and benefits to what the shopper really wants and needs. Customer Experience Management simply put is the compass, formulas, and habits you use to completely manage a customer's experiences at every level and touch point with your company, your product, your brand and service.

Building a company that gives customers consistently great experiences is complicated and easier said than done. I'll talk about how to wow in our next issue and you can begin to turn the tide that will separate you from the competition.