

PUT DOWN THE PURSE: PICK UP AN EXPERIENCE

WHY DOES A CUSTOMER'S EXPERIENCE WITH YOU, MEAN SO MUCH? By Neil Osborne

What's the ultimate question you'd ask your salon customers? Is it perhaps, 'How likely is it that you'd recommend us to your family or colleague?' And what, do you think, would influence their answer? Price: tick. Service: tick. People: tick. Results: tick. Yes, you're right, it would be all those things, because boiled down together they form a sticky glue that's called their experience with you...

So first things first, exactly what's included in a customer experience? The best definition I've seen comes from the Branding Strategy Insider website: "a series of integrated actions that work together to lift a transaction beyond the everyday. These actions should be so specific to the spirit and values of that brand that they are immediately recognisable."

The important aspect to understand is that 'the experience' is often the only way customers' differentiate between brands, or (in your case) salons. Why? Because it's seldom the simple service itself – a cut, colour or curl – that really distinguishes you from another salon in your suburb. More often, it's everything else that wraps around the functional act of going to your salon.

So, why is it that an experience counts so much? It comes down to science and psychology:

1. SHINY OBJECTS GO DULL OVER TIME

Over the past decade, an abundance of psychology research has shown that experiences bring people more happiness, than possessions. Even unpleasant experiences – although I'm not recommending you actively create those – are, in hindsight, thought of more highly than spending money on material goods and services.

That's due to what's called, the Easterlin paradox. Want a translation? It means no matter the glory of your purchase, it doesn't last for long. You'll quickly adapt to your shiny new objects and ... shock, horror, start taking them for granted. You'll even become unhappy with them.



However, ...

2. INTANGIBLES ARE MORE SPECIAL

Your joy grows, over time, after an experience. Yes, it does seem counterintuitive that something like a physical object (that you'll have for a long time) doesn't keep you as happy, for as long, as a once-and-done experience does.

However, Dr Thomas Gilovich, a psychology professor at Cornell University who has studied money and happiness for over two decades, told Fast Company that the reason for that is because people connect over shared experiences, memories and interactions, "We consume experiences directly with other people, and after [the moment's] gone, they're part of the stories that we tell to one another."

That's because, ...

3. CONNECTION PLAYS THE TRUMP CARD

Shared experiences connect us more to other people. It's an obvious reaction to tell others about good things that happen, however over time, even difficult experiences are turned into 'not so bad' stories that are shared as memories, valuable life lessons or mistakes (like that ombre colour) never to be made again. Each one of those stories hold great value – as part of our character, identify and body of work.

Gilovich's work also showed that experiences tend to make people happier because it's harder to measure (and compare) the monetary value of the experience, when discussing it with others – because each person values its aspects, differently.

HOW DO YOU CREATE A MEMORABLE SALON EXPERIENCE?

1. Know the message that you're looking to convey
2. Select and apply the best touchpoints through which to convey and reinforce that message
3. Use each touchpoint meaningfully, appropriately and distinctly

Finally, think of it this way. Memories are all we get to keep from our experience of life. Make sure the ones you give your customers, are unforgettable.

Neil Osborne is an elite sales trainer and brand coach who is unique in the salon marketplace. He has devoted more than 30 years of his working life to the Salon Industry and has been responsible for dramatically growing brands and businesses by helping them launch, develop and change their sales results with his salon-specific, results driven methods. Contact him at The SALES CATALYST, 1300 302 859 or go to www.thesalescatalyst.com.au