

instincts

Instincts is a monthly publication on branding for clients, associates and friends.

Leading and inspiring all those who touch the enterprise
to understand, embrace and enhance the power of your brand.

I want a Grande Bold, with a full experience.

The only substitute word for Brand is culture, and culture is tough to substitute.



Brands are built and protected with consistency. And one of the most consistent brands is Starbucks, which has been built with considerable energy to ensure its consistency of presentation, communication and experience. Yet, even a leader can stumble. A few recent experiences with Starbucks have tarnished their brand for me. I walked into the Toronto airport for one of those ridiculously early check-ins and headed straight for my early morning ritual - the Grande Bold - only to find people there who didn't give a damn about the Starbucks we know and love.

Sure, it tasted the same (I think) but you start to realize that the coffee, while good, isn't that different than what others offer. For Starbucks, it is the experience that differentiates the product - cool people, who according to my local spot are hired and coached to treat customers like family, they're who make the coffee cool.

The phenomenon that is Starbucks has grown across North America, and around the world, on the strength of their re-mark-ability. Little mass advertising has ever been used to build the brand, rather people have experienced it as they wandered in to investigate what a friend told them was cool coffee experience.

But brand and culture are tough to replicate, especially beyond your own walls.

What would brand coach suggest?

In the case of the airport outlet, there are - we're assuming - a number of factors (like unions, hiring processes and training) which may be outside the reach of Starbucks. Without the daily coaching of barristas to create the welcoming familiar experience, these outlets will necessarily struggle to replicate the Starbucks experience their loyal customers will be looking for. Perhaps, in the end, Starbucks should reconsider its decision to introduce outlets in circumstances where it cannot fully deploy its culture program.

The lure of further distribution and of additional sales can sometimes blinds leadership from the critical success factors which build the business in the first place.

Here are a few other situations where the Brand simply doesn't work nearly as well without the full intended experience:

- *Krispy Kremes Doughnuts at Petro Canada, without the bakeshop and the wonderful aroma*
- *Webers hamburgers from Loblaws, without the much needed stretch and the other cottage-bound folk*
- *Virgin Mobility in Canada, without lots of crazy Richard Branson antics*

Where have you experienced the loss of an 'experience'?