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Destroying a brand

By Paperitalo Staff

Personally, I take a view that the idea of a brand is a very broad concept indeed. You are a brand, personally—it is largely your reputation. The company you work for sells brands, be it paper, machinery, services or whatever. Even the recycled fiber sellers are “brands”—I know situations where certain recycled fiber sellers will not be allowed back on the site because of the ways they have dealt with a mill before.

Recent events seem to suggest we can, in real time, watch a retail brand being destroyed right now. The brand? Hilton Hotels. It started back in the winter when they devalued their point system. They devalued it significantly—as evidenced with recent experiences. Back in December, we stayed at the Conrad Hotel (a Hilton Brand) in lower Manhattan for 50,000 points per night. In late May we stayed in the same hotel again—for 32,000 points per night PLUS \$150.00 per night. Quite a difference.

Just this week, the Hilton in midtown Manhattan announced it is stopping room service. Says it is too expensive. I thought having a piece of pie and a glass of milk delivered to my room at 11:00 pm for \$25.00 surely had a wee bit of profit built in.

The Hilton chain has stopped delivering newspapers to rooms, too—although this may be the general cost of newspapers more than anything else.

I have been loyal to the Hilton brands for years. But do you see what is happening here? They are making changes that I notice, changes that convey to me they are becoming less service oriented, less interested in the customer, more interested in gouging us for every dollar they can.

This is a dangerous place to be, no matter what your brand is (again, including yourself). For once one sets a level of expectation of performance, any deterioration in that level is noticed. And even more importantly, it raises the sensitivity of those watching you. Now, they are looking for any signs of further deterioration.

I have seen this happen with employees. Reliable old Fred comes to work on time every day for twenty-five years. All of a sudden, his behavior changes. He shows up late, he leaves early, perhaps he misses a day every now and then. Everyone starts wondering what happened to Fred—and they watch him like they have never watched him before. This is where the danger

lies—perhaps Fred had some other quirks all along, but no one noticed them because he was so reliable overall. Now, under the microscope, Fred’s eccentricities shine. In weeks, he is destroyed—credibility is completely shot. Don’t be a Fred.

For safety this week, you may not realize it, but you depend on well-known brands of safety equipment. And, if one ever fails you, I’ll bet you’ll banish it from your company. Brands are important.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##