



BRAND PROMISE

Keep Your Brand Alive - Promise The Clouds, Deliver Heaven!

By Joseph Kimotho

The FIFA World Cup is definitely a massive global brand laden with many promises of excitement, great football, fair competition, bridging of religious/racial divides and of course moments of national pride. What makes it the single most successful global sporting event is the fact that it delivers on its brand promises every time.

The recently concluded FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia was no exception. We experienced great football and really exciting moments. As football commentator Oliver Carrol of the Independent Newspaper summarized it: "The football was good, with teams much closer to one another than previously thought, it was a tournament of drama, incongruity and the triumph of the supposed underdog... the five opening

goals against Saudi Arabia; the superstar Cristiano Ronaldo turning up in provincial Saransk; the crazed and colorful Iranian, Peruvian, Colombian supporters; the Senegalese warm-up dance; the Japanese fans picking up their litter; the German machine breaking down; the Argentine despair amid Brazilian smugness; the Brazilian despair amid Argentine smugness; the sublime Belgian football; Pickford's saves; England's unexpected progress; and Gareth Southgate's waistcoat... and, of course, for the hosts: that victory over Spain."

There were plenty of moments to celebrate and make it worth our time to watch the event across the countries – and next time they are having a World Cup, we will back on our screens to watch if not the terraces of Qatar's stadiums.

As I reflected on the success of the just concluded World Cup, my mind was drawn to contrast it to another global sporting event that took place some time back in mid - 2015. The Boxing Match between Mayweather and Pacquiao on May 2nd 2015. I remember attending a Marketing Society of Kenya dinner event a few days after the match and sharing a table with my friend and marketing comrade; the CEO of Marketing Africa - Mr. William Kalombo.

As he was chomping away at his steak, the clinker of his cutlery could tell that there was a lot on the man's mind. Before I could ask what it was, it came bursting out 'what was all this fuss about? What was the hype all about? Joseph, did you watch that lame fight? Why did we stay up all night to watch it? These guys over-marketed and over-promised that bout, they are making marketing look bad.

Of course a very animated discussion ensued at the table with opinions flowing freely and it got me thinking. The disappointment at the table was not because any of the guys was an ardent boxing fan. Actually none of these guys cared about Mayweather or Pacquiao before that last fight. The problem was that a marketer somewhere promised them a thrilling experience, they bought the promise but the product did not live up to it.

The Sports Illustrated magazine commented

When a brand fails to honor its promise the expected outcome is that customers feel cheated, resent themselves for being gullible, and get confused about their ability to make sound judgments. This of course is with varying levels of intensity depending on factors such as the level of investment involved, functionality of the product or service, psychological make-up of the consumer among others.

THE PERFECT MATCH TO SPARK YOUR DISRUPTIVE BRAND



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on that fight as follows: After five years of negotiations, of stops and starts, of back and forth and more expletive-laced insults than a Tarantino movie, we finally had it: Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao, the fight of the century, the (latest) fight to save boxing. What a disappointment!

The Guardian Newspaper quoted fellow boxer Oscar De La Hoya taunting Floyd Mayweather: "Another reason boxing is better off without you: You were afraid. Afraid of taking chances. Afraid of risk," he wrote. 'A perfect example is your greatest 'triumph,' the long-awaited record-breaking fight between you and Manny Pacquiao. Nearly 4.5m buys! More than \$400 million in revenue! Headlines worldwide! How can that be bad for boxing? Because you lied. You promised action and entertainment and a battle for the ages, and you delivered none of the above.'

For sure, no other sports agency has attempted to sell us a thrilling boxing match since then, they know we won't buy it! Let's use this case to explore the importance of honoring brand promises and the consequences of failing to do so.

How far is too far when it comes to making brand promises? Is there a term like over-marketing? At what point does marketing zeal and communication ethics intersect? What is the effect of broken promises on the future of marketing?

We need to first analyze what exactly happened in the run-up to the Mayweather/Pacman bout that had the entire globe on a spin. There was need creation. Since the days of yore when Mohammed Ali, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield and George Foreman ruled, the world has been in earnest expectation for a return to glory of the boxing sport. This fight was marketed as exactly that. It became a bigger brand than the individual boxers' brands and the customers were sold out on the expectations but they did not deliver.

The result of this is that it will be extremely difficult for the boxing industry to obtain such a hold on the entire world with a similar promise. The number of boxing 'sceptics' and 'indifferents' with regard to the boxing industry has grown considerably and boxing marketers will have a more uphill task hyping future matches to the same level. This is a clear indication that

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inflated promises are self-defeating and contribute greatly to numbing customers to marketing communications. It's a disservice to the marketing profession.

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The brand then becomes a cognitive symbol of all those negative emotions and is henceforth repulsive. This is at the core of normal human behavior. When expectations aren't met, you attach symbolism to the object of dissatisfaction/disappointment and try to avoid it by seeking alternatives.

That should logically explain without justifying, the many married couples with a myriad of 'side dishes' or 'mpango wa kandos' in our society. They are naturally responding to brand promises that were marketed to them during dating and courtship only to be broken spectacularly

before the words 'I do' could leave their lips.

Understanding A Brand

Promise

A brand promise represents what a company stands for, or does not stand for. It is the unique statement of the company's offer, what distinguishes it from its rivals and what makes it worthy of customers' attention. A recent Gallup poll among US companies showed that the brand promise matters a lot to customers and have a profound impact on business outcomes.

The highest-performing companies in Gallup's database deliver on their brand promise 75% of the time, according to their customers. These companies have greater levels of customer engagement, which enables them to surpass their competitors in terms of share of wallet, profitability, and revenue.

Susan Gunelius the author of 'Building Brand Value the Playboy Way' states that 'a brand is not a logo, symbol or a catchy tagline, it is all about a promise. A brand that consistently keeps its promise in every aspect of its business - from the advertising to their employee relations and everything in between - can be very powerful'

Therefore when the customer trusts that a brand will meet their expectations, not only are they more likely to become repeat purchasers, but they're also more likely to talk about the brand. They become brand loyalists and vocal brand advocates who provide the brand with word-of-mouth marketing that no marketing budget can ever achieve for you.

This is more real today as the brand buzz travels across the social web via blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and so on. In other words, keeping your brand promise leads to brand loyalty, repeat purchases from your brand loyalists, increased brand awareness among a wider audience, and new customers.

What Leads To Unkept Brand Promises?

Research has shown that only a fraction



of companies are able to live up to their brand promise all the time. This is despite clear evidence that well fulfilled brand promise ensures the sustainability of the business into the future. What affects the delivery of the brand promise?

Over-promising: This is where a brand claims what it cannot deliver in terms of product attributes, benefits and features. In this case the brand communicates what it wishes to represent rather than what it actually represents. The phrase 'fake it till you make it' best explains this scenario. It only takes the point of usage which is a moment of truth, to reveal the bluff and kill any possibilities of re-purchase.

Incompatibility with internal structure: Sometime the marketing team develops a brand promise that is inconsistent with what production, supply chain, sales or HR teams believe in. This causes disconnect in the delivery of the promise since successful customer satisfaction is a company-wide effort. In such cases, it is important that internal marketing is thoroughly done to ensure that the culture and greater purpose of the whole company is aligned to the

brand promise. Most members of staff may have good intentions, but their actions can be totally disconnected from the brand promise. It is therefore important to ensure that what they are saying and doing is fully aligned to the brand promise.

A promise too similar to competition: The primary role of a brand promise is to differentiate your product/service from competition. It should be a driver of uniqueness in the industry to endear your brand to its consumers.

A promise that plays 'me too' to its competitors will not deliver on this uniqueness and will therefore be an effort in futility. The brand promise must be clear and the delivery must be in sync to ensure that the customer experiences the uniqueness throughout the brand interaction process.

Failing to develop the brand promise 'outside-in': Brand owners must begin by understanding the customers' needs and expectations then crafting their promises to fit. The result of this is a vigorous internal effort to provide what the customer is

already expecting. Employees will always be the driving force behind a brand, so they must thoroughly understand that promise and the importance of delivering on it consistently. The fact is that most businesses face serious challenges in delivering on brand promises due to internal workplace issues as opposed to external marketplace issues.

It is therefore of paramount importance that before promises are communicated to customers, a thorough audit of internal capability to deliver on them is carried out and ascertained.

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