

Book Review for 5/02/04 by James DeConinck

Title: "Brands That Rock: What Business Leaders Can Learn from the World of Rock and Roll"

Authors: Roger Blackwell and Tina Stephan

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright: 2004

Length: 240 pages

Price: \$19.00

Reading time: 4 hours

Reading rating: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10=very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1=average; 4 = outstanding)

"Brands That Rock" explains how companies can achieve brand loyalty by examining how rock and roll legends have achieved and sustained success for many decades. You might wonder what business managers can learn from the world of rock and roll musicians. These authors have written an entertaining and insightful book that details how musicians such as Elton John and the Rolling Stones continue to perform in front of sellout arenas many years after they started performing. How have they maintained great customer loyalty over the years, especially considering that many of these artists have not had a hit song in a long time?

The answer to this question is to transform customers into fans. People who attend rock and roll concerts don't consider themselves as customers. They are fans of the artists. But they are customers just like shoppers who patronage Wal-Mart. They purchase CDs and concert tickets. Fans, however, have certain distinguishable attributes from customers. According to Blackwell and Stephan, "the fan's desire is not just to buy the latest music but to create a further connection with a particular brand or performer." Fans shop for pleasure, want personalized advice and solutions, and actively invest in the relationship with the artist or company. Customers, however, shop opportunistically, need a reason to buy from a company, and don't think or talk about a particular company.

An influential brand provides a company with an image. Essentially it is a promise to customers that the product will fulfill their expectations. If the brand meets consumers' expectations, they will continue to purchase the product and may recommend it to other people. However, when the promise is broken, consumers will abandon the brand for another one. This book explains that companies can achieve strong brand loyalty by understanding their customers at an emotional level. For example, what makes customers angry? What makes them happy?

As shown by the legendary rock bands, turning customers into fans is a dynamic process that requires understanding the emotions of consumers. An emotional link must exist between the rock band or company and consumers. A great example of this emotional link can be found between Elvis Presley and his fans. Although Elvis has been dead for

many years, fans still adore him. Many musicians have talent. But unlike Elvis, few ever achieve more than their 15 minutes of fame (one hit wonders).

A similar situation exists with respect to businesses. Companies spend a lot of money developing and test marketing products. However, few of them are great successes in the long run.

The musicians and bands mentioned in this book (Elton John, KISS, The Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, Madonna, and Neil Diamond) have some common traits. They have not veered too far from their strengths and sounds. They don't want to alienate their core group of fans. But they have evolved when necessary to attract a new group of fans.

Some of the strategies that these performers have used that can be employed by business to transform customers into fans are (1) create an emotional connection with customers; (2) create realistic expectations that can be met; (3) stay fresh in the marketplace; (4) resist the temptation of overexposure; and (5) match your message with your mission and your audience.

For fans of rock and roll, this book is a fun read. It provides a lot of information about how some of your favorite musicians developed strategies to achieve and maintain success. But even if you don't like The Rolling Stones or Elton John, this book provides great advice for building a successful business or brand.

Jim DeConinck is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the College of Business at Western Carolina. His primary teaching responsibilities are professional selling and negotiation. His research interests are investigating employee turnover and business ethics. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at www.wcu.edu/cob/bookreviews.