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5 TELLTALE SIGNS A BRAND LACKS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ... AND WHY CONSUMERS CARE

By Merilee Kern

A 2023 Emotional Intelligence Market study citing “heavy growth” of \$49.93 billion by 2027 exemplifies the extent to which mastering “EQ” versus IQ is taking brands to exciting new levels of success ... and why not embracing EQ can result in extreme opportunity loss or, far worse, be an outright brand buster. This as today’s highly discriminating and demanding marketplace is seemingly rife with substitutable solutions. Whether the B2B or B2C sector, more often than not today’s consumers have alternate options—and they know it.

Although there is tremendous buzz advocating the power and efficacy of emotional intelligence in modern marketing and branding endeavors, there is little consistency and clarity on fundamental best practices and methodologies that can serve as a baseline catalyst. Fundamentals that, when further honed and refined, can result in highly sophisticated and emotive brand building that wholly resonates with the intended audiences and compels them into the desired action.

As importantly, that same clarity is needed on things to avoid—pitfalls that can impede progress as a brand seeks to engage and truly connect with the hearts and minds of their intended audience—not just their wallets. Doing so breeds the kind of loyalty that can sustain consumer relationships for a lifetime.

Below, Martha Marchesi, CEO of JK Design—a full-service creative agency, provides insights on five telltale signs that a brand may lack emotional intelligence and how to ensure EQ is employed effectively in marketing strategies:

Lack of empathy in messaging: An emotionally intelligent brand demonstrates empathy by understanding and addressing its customers’ emotions, concerns, and needs. A brand that lacks empathy may come across as cold, indifferent, or out-of-touch in its messaging, often creating a disconnect between the brand and its audience. This can not only lead to a weakened brand image but also outright customer dissatisfaction. Egregious and extreme cases of brands being emotionally “tone deaf” can cause a brand to be publicly “flamed” on social media and elsewhere.

One great way to exhibit empathy in brand messaging is by addressing common and specific customer pain points like that related to productivity, financial, processes, and support. Another approach is to use storytelling that highlights relatable customer experiences related to cost savings, productivity, efficiencies, and customer support.

One-size-fits-all communication: Emotionally intelligent brands tailor their messaging to different customer segments. Brands that rely on generic, cookie-cutter, and impersonal communication might not resonate with or address their audience’s specific needs. EQ enlightened brands consider more targeted messaging.

Overemphasis on features, not benefits: Emotionally intelligent brands understand that customers care more about the benefits of a product or service—the WIIFM (what’s in it for me) factor—than its nuts and bolts features. Brands that focus too heavily on product attributes and technical specifications should shift their focus to how those features will improve customers’ lives.

A great way to do this is by using clear and concise benefit statements related to a product's usability, safety, environmental responsibility, affordability, durability, and more. Or that a service will save you time, make you more efficient and productive, enhance the quality of your work, or make an experience more enjoyable. Cite as many user benefits as possible to make an unequivocal case as to why your solution is THE solution.

Disregard for customer feedback: Emotionally intelligent brands actively seek, value, and utilize customer feedback to improve their products and services and fine-tune future messaging. Brands that dismiss or ignore customer feedback may struggle to develop a loyal customer base. Endeavor to prioritize incorporating customer insights into brand strategy. Do this by conducting regular informal polls, more formal customer surveys, actively monitoring social media channels or hosting focus groups.

Customer feedback, however positive or negative, is valuable and powerful market research. However, beyond just collecting and cataloging the data, EQ-driven brands take concerted action on each viable data point—including sharing those insights with all applicable internal teams and other appropriate stakeholders to ensure the collective has an accurate “temperature” and cohesive understanding of the organization's KPIs at any given time.

Inability to convey brand values: Emotionally intelligent brands embrace and effectively communicate their core values and beliefs. Their figuratively wear their brand values as a badge of honor and let those ideals guide the way as the company's marketing communications North Star. For example, brands can easily showcase their commitment to sustainability through overt green initiatives, which customers are made aware of through public communications and discourse. Efforts to demonstrate how values are being upheld can be detailing those efforts on a brand's own website, but should endeavor to go beyond by including citations in public relations, social media, on and offline advertising, direct email and newsletters, signage, and other MarComm efforts. Or, some highly EQ-equipped brands exemplify their values by actively participating in charitable events that align.

While the expression certainly need not be overtly impassioned or “over the top,” brands that fail to express their values or purpose in some identifiable way may need to reassess how they communicate their mission. This recalibration can foster a stronger emotional connection with prospects and customers. A good first step in this direction is clearly defining and articulating your brand values internally. From there, systematically and concertedly integrate those values across all marketing channels with consistency, ensuring a cohesive and authentic message is conveyed to your audience at every possible touchpoint.

Emotional intelligence is key to any marketing strategy. It should be upheld as your brand's North Star from which to craft your story, develop inspired positioning and brand architecture, empower your sales force, create engaging content, collaborate with your creative team, transform the typical e-commerce experience into a story-driven customer journey, measure your results and so much more.

By making impactful and authentic emotional connections with your audience and continuously fine-tuning that approach, you can drive meaningful results—the kind that creates even unforeseen advantages and helps you not just achieve but exceed your goals.

