

Over Deliver – Under Promise

For most manufacturers this initially would sound like a nightmare – but is it?

Recently I checked into The Peninsula Hotel in Chicago. Knowing the brand your expectations are by default tuned to the highest level – still I've time after time managed to be surprised. When I wished to access music in my room, I was told that the CD library didn't exist in this particular hotel. The apologetic concierge however asked me out of curiosity which CD's I was looking for. Listing all my favourite names I hang up wondering the reason for this curiosity. 20 minutes later the bell rang on my door. The same person as I've been speaking with over the phone handed over a bag with three CD's purchased by the hotel, all matching my name – and given as a gift to me.

I bet you'll never forget this story – neither do I. But the case is that the extra \$20 the hotel decided to spend on my account makes me spread the story – just like now. Would you still claim this wasn't worth the investment ... hardly!

The story is very much in line with another experience taking place in a Louis Vuitton store, the maker of luxury leather goods, which explicitly does not offer a lifetime warranty on its products. In fact, the company's documentation states a charge will be applied for repairs. The salesperson to whom you return your faulty product further reiterates this when you take it in for repair. But when you come back to collect your item, you'll almost never pay for the

service. The salesperson assures you this was done especially for you.

The over deliver and under promise builds your brand in ways which few can imagine – as it reflects a brand which cares about you – rather than a brand which traditionally only cares about it's shareholders. It's a story, which stays with you for life – and not only keeps you as a loyal customer – it makes you spread the rumour. If you don't believe me ask any kid about how many bricks there is in any box of LEGO –and the answer would be – “there are always too many bricks in the box”. I remember as a kid I always noticed the pleasant surprise – which always made me think this was a special gift for me. Many years later, when visiting the factory I realized, other factors were the true reason for this generosity – still the story stays with me forever.

I'm certain that my Peninsula, the Louis Vuitton or LEGO experience isn't written down in some manual – still it has time after time shown to be consistent every time I've been spending time with these brands.. But how? The reason might be found on the very top of the 70 year old Sydney Harbour Bridge, an icon, which some years ago was opened to the public for what is called a Bridge Walk. The walk takes you through a 4-hour tour on top of the arches of the very bridge – allowing you to view the entire Sydney harbour.

The surprising bit wasn't the bridge walk – but the motivation showed by the guides which time after time

seemed to keep up an amazing spirit – despite having walked up-and-down the bridge several hundred times in all sorts of weather.... I asked Adam, my guide and was told an amazing explanation.

Prior to the first as a practicing guide – they go through a 4-month education program. The first months is packed with lessons about how to handle people with panic attacks. You know fear of heights. The second months is dedicated to learning how to memorize the visitor's names – as well as presentation techniques. You should think that the last two months would be dedicated to learning about the bridge and Sydney and its harbour – but wrong! In stead the soon-to-be-guides were left alone with the assignment of creating their own presentation – a two months assignment – ensuring an amazing ownership of the story, the topic and energy.

But what does all this have to do with the Peninsula or Louis Vuitton story, and my mantra about over delivering and under promising? It's simple – leaving it all to comprehensive brand manuals won't do it. You can't program a surprise – but you can however instead secure an understanding about the fundamental components creating a true surprise and hand over the execution to the members



of your team. Today in a world where cost cutting has become the rule of every product or service – consumers are left in a world where surprises are more surprising than ever – and unfortunately only for the negative. Far too seldom true positive surprises arrive – but when they do – they are spread like wild fire between consumers because they tell a story we all would like to experience. I'm sure both Louis Vuitton, Peninsula or LEGO would all agree with me that the cost of such experience isn't overwhelming – in fact it is only our extreme cost focus which keeps us away from this way of thinking.

Who doesn't love giving something away?

It not only spreads the rumours and generates happy customers – it also builds a staff motivation which probably – converted into education and staff motivation programs – would be far cheaper and far more sincere. And that's what branding is all about – building sincere human brands – which we all instantly can relate to.