

Digital first-impressions matter

 By [Brent Haumann](#)

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In today's world, chances are that the first time a customer comes across your business, it won't be through an advert or a shopfront, but online. That digital first-impression matters far more than you might think. As is the case in the real world, you only get one chance at a good digital first impression. Get it wrong and your potential customer will swiftly move on to a competitor. But if you get it right, then you'll be well on your way to having a loyal customer for some time to come.



Source: www.pexels.com

Your organisation also has to be prepared to make that impression quickly. Research shows that you have just seven seconds to make a first impression. And as with any relationship, it's important to realise that the first impression is just the beginning.

Even more important however, is understanding that most people split their first impressions into two categories:

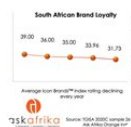
1. As a prospective buyer
2. As a new customer.

It is the latter where most organisations are failing to deliver on creating a lasting impression.

Beyond acquisition

Far too many companies don't give enough thought to what happens after a customer has signed up for their product or service. How do they ensure that the customer stays happy and loyal and is likely to recommend that organisation to their friends and family?

So much time, effort and care is poured into acquiring new customers in order to secure a sale, but then the ball is completely dropped when onboarding and inducting a new customer. Many organisations miss out on this once-off opportunity to reassure new customers of their choice to purchase, empower them with the information they require, guide them through this murky nursery phase and create a powerful first impression that sets the tone for the relationship going forward.



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To exacerbate the missed opportunity, the effort poured into acquiring new customers creates an even larger expectation of the service that one would expect post acquisition. This creates a first-impression chasm that is difficult to come back from regardless of future service levels or product quality.

An issue across industries

If you reflect back on your own customer experiences, you'll likely recall multiple instances where businesses have failed to communicate with you effectively after you signed up for a new service, let alone making you feel unique and welcome. I'm not talking about the conventional, generic messages that say "Welcome, we have attached a copy of your contract", but rather the ones that speak to your specific context and requirements and reassure you about your purchasing decision.

Consider the mobile network operator who only contacts you when it's time to upgrade, or the insurer who only reaches out to you when your policy has to be renewed. In both circumstances, I'm almost certain you had a disappointing welcome when you first signed up, and even less personalised interaction as your contract progressed. During that time however I'm sure you had a lot of other competing companies vying for your attention. With the ease and speed with which you can switch service providers these days, it's likely that you're constantly on the verge of leaving your current provider. This is the modern-day consequence of businesses failing to develop long-term connections with their customers, and people simply voting with their feet (and of course, their wallets).

But what if businesses didn't act this way? How much would it help them? The answer, as it turns out, is "a lot." According to research, 73% of respondents prefer brands that tailor their experience to them. Furthermore, 43% of customers spend more money on brands to whom they are loyal. It's also worth noting that existing customers account for 65% of a company's business revenue.

It is therefore a no-brainer for organisations to invest in building a powerful first-impression with new customers and to develop a solid ongoing relationship long before asking them to recommit. We already know that a simple and powerful customer experience can influence customer behaviour, allowing organisations to boost digital channel adoption and customer self-service while also increasing expenditure frequency and volume. As a result, the cost to serve is reduced. The benefits are in addition to the well-known advantages of loyalty and advocacy (the two most powerful forces in business today).



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Consistent, personalised communication

It's simply not logical for businesses to only communicate with customers when they need something from them. Consider this analogy: if two people asked you for R10,000, would you give it to the friend, who you see all the time and has always had your back, or to that one person with whom you once had a crazy party and never heard from again?

The friend you give the loan to is the one who creates a great impression. And they set the tone for the relationship over and over again. Organisations should do the same thing.

Once you've been wooed into signing up for a product or service, you should expect the red carpet to be rolled out. You should receive an individualised digital welcome pack that outlines how to get access to everything you need and who to contact if you have any problems. It should include a glossary of terms and an explanation of what each document is for, as well as a personalised video tailored to your specific needs, and a consolidated dashboard that welcomes you into the family. Following that, during the next several weeks, you should anticipate to receive carefully curated information that is provided to you as and when it is needed, empowering you as a new client and building on the first experience.

All of a sudden, a business has fundamentally changed the relationship, and the circumstances for trust and long-term loyalty are established.

Given the benefits of taking this approach and the risks of not doing so, it makes sense to not just generate a strong initial impression, but to build on it and maintain it.

ABOUT BRENT HAUMANN

Brent Haumann is the Managing Director at Tilt.

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