

## STOP SELLING COMMODITY PRODUCTS

Every commodity wrapped in a blanket of creativity and conscientiousness becomes a differentiated product and a unique customer experience.

Coffee is traded as a commodity, along with cattle, hogs, cotton and corn. Just don't tell the customers at Starbucks that their \$4.00 cup o' Joe is a commodity because it might tick them off as much as it would those folks drinking designer waters for \$24 a gallon. Is the combination of raw-material chemicals and fragrances that make up Chanel #5 worth the \$124 for a 1.7 ounce Parfum Spray? These people sell commodities. How do they get away with it?

They get away with it because they are not selling commodities. When you visit Starbucks, you go there for the experience of drinking pretty good coffee in an atmosphere of like-minded people who are chatting or surfing the Net on their laptops. The coffee cup has the right branding in an insulated wrap to remind you that this stuff is hot. When you drink your designer water, you are convinced that somehow this water is the purest or most nutritious available. Or, you just like the convenience or snob appeal of a branded product. When someone sprays Chanel #5, it is not the chemical aroma that is appealing; it is the seductive appeal of hope.

Don't your customers deserve an experience like these coffee-drinking, water-guzzling, good-smelling people? I think they do. I don't care what you sell—it is more than a commodity. If you believe that you sell a commodity product, let's call it what it is—an undifferentiated customer experience. You cheapen your experience by ignoring opportunities to stand out. Everything that is sold can be imitated, differentiated, or innovated. When you claim that what you sell is no different than the competition, you have tacitly admitted that you are imitating each other. They have not simply copied you; you are imitating them, too.

The two things that help you stand out are your creativity and conscientiousness. The only things that limit you are the edge of your imagination and your willingness to go the extra mile.

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