

Growth Principle #10: WOW Factor

Find that certain special something that will amaze your customers.

As we wrap up the 'All Systems Grow!' Series we're going to end by exploring what may be the single most important factor in how a company performs over time – wowing the customer.

As I've said many times before, 'customer satisfaction' is not my favorite term. It implies that your goal is for people to walk away feeling 'OK', but not amazed... Satisfied, but not so excited they want to tell all their friends. If you really want to take a leap to the next level I urge you to go for the 'wow factor' and look beyond simple satisfaction.

The Virgin Group, launched 40 years ago by Sir Richard Branson, has become one of the most powerful and iconic organizations on the face of the earth by adhering to one simple principle – let's give the customer some FUN!

That lighthearted commitment to joy and unparalleled quality, as well as the less tangible elements of surprise and genuine concern for people, helped Virgin hit \$1 billion in sales faster than any other company ever founded.

How can you leverage the 'wow factor' to build your own business? Understand a few basic principles and you're well on your way:

Mediocrity is BAD. The middle of the pack can seem like a safe place to be. You play off of your competitors, mimic other products and services, match your pricing to the market and try not to stand out. The problem with that strategy is that customers won't see you as any different from the next guy. They won't pay attention to your brand, respond to your promotions or tell other people about you. Today's competitive climate is fierce, and if you choose to play it safe and accept mediocrity someone more memorable to your audience will easily edge you out.

What you like doesn't matter – what your customer likes does! Most business owners get hung up on their own agenda and preferences. It's human nature... 'I love the color fuchsia –let's use that!'... 'Who wouldn't want a lipstick dispenser in their car?'... 'We all shop online so a retail presence is pointless.' Take the time to get to know your customer intimately and to give them what they want. Go a step farther and think beyond their conscious desires to create amazing experiences and exemplary products that they would never even have thought of.

Take the 'wow factor' to the front lines. If you know and adhere to your customer commitment religiously and your staff, distributors and vendors don't, you're setting yourself up to fail. In order to create a truly stellar customer experience, you have to pull everyone into the vision. From the receptionist who answers your phone, to the sales staff, to the retail clerk, to your distribution channels... everyone has to understand the power of 'wow' and work hard to exceed customer expectations. At the end of the day, companies are just big groups of people working together towards a common aim. Make sure your team is all about 'wow'!

Respect the value of loyalty. All a business really has to bank on is its customer base. You may have intellectual property you've created, but if no one buys it - who cares? You may have a highly educated staff, but if they can't make money and you can't pay them - who cares? You may have a beautiful facility, but if no ones comes in - who cares? Your customers are the lifeblood of your business and everything you do must revolve around their experience with you. Share your vision with customers. Communicate with them. Offer opportunities to interact. And never, ever break your brand promises.

Quantify the promotional power of 'wow'. That 'certain special something' is a very valuable commodity in your business world. Competitors can copy your products, offer similar services, mimic your ads and raise more capital, but the one thing they can never steal from you is your ability to deliver an exceptional experience to your customers every time. They cannot usurp your relationship with people who are passionate about your brand. The 'wow factor' negates the need to pay a pretty penny for marketing, it keeps your staff happy, it helps you innovate without endless investment in R&D, it keeps people coming back and talking about you. Make no mistake... 'wow' is not fluff - wow is priceless.

My entire mission in life is to help company's achieve their best and embody the dreams of their founders, employees and customers.

If you need to, go back and review the entire business growth series. Every article builds on the last, and I sincerely hope that the focus points of All Systems Grow! will help you transform your company from ordinary to extraordinary.