WINNING THE CUSTOMER

TURN CONSUMERS INTO FANS
AND GET THEM TO SPEND MORE

LOU IMBRIANO
ELIZABETH KING
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CHAPTER 1

TRANSACTIONAL VERSUS RELATIONSHIP MARKETING MODEL

For most of the team's early existence, the New England Patriots brand was widely considered all-around flimsy: a marginal team on the playing field and a mediocre, middle-of-the-pack business organization. Everything about the organization reeked of poor business planning and knee-jerk decision making. Games were rarely sold out, and I remember as a kid following the news to see if the coming Sunday's home game was going to be blacked out on TV because of the lack of interest in attending games at Foxboro Stadium. The stadium was built on the cheap and was outdated as soon as it opened. When it rained, the concourses flooded. I'm not exaggerating when I tell you there was not one true fan amenity in that building; its most egregious flaw was posing as an NFL stadium while offering only cold aluminum benches instead of seats. Those metal benches epitomized price-driven decision making and made it blatantly clear that no thought had been given to the fans.

Today, just about anyone who is familiar with the team, fan or not, views the organization as a model franchise—both on the field and in its business structure and execution—and it has the Forbes magazine cover story to prove it. As with the vast majority of successful businesses, transforming it from so-so to a powerhouse did not occur overnight; it took years of careful reorganization from the ground up (and the top down) to reinvent both the brand and the business model to the level of excellence it now enjoys.

When I joined the New England Patriots back in 1997, the transformation had already been set in motion. The rebuilding of the organization had begun, initiated shortly after the Kraft family purchased the team and grounded in the family's clear vision of the team's future. Because the Krafts had owned Foxboro Stadium prior to buying the
Chapter 2

Consumer Affinity: Making Fans of Your Customers

Having built my entire career in sports, I have come to appreciate that the consumers for the organizations I have worked for have been fans. The real power of having fans instead of merely customers didn’t truly dawn on me until I had been through a couple of seasons with the Patriots. It really began to sink in as we created new events: not only were fans enthralled with the thought of the team and everything associated with it, but their appetite to consume anything and everything Patriots was insatiable. That’s when it really hit me: fans are consumers. Sure, I always knew they spent money to see the team, but it’s deeper than that. Fans become consumed with the team. Once that clicked, I never looked at fans the same way again.

Thinking about promotions that we could create that would compel fans to spend more money with the team became a sport in itself. Like clockwork, the more we gave them what they wanted, the more they bought. Turning fans into consumers was not exactly a grueling task—after all, they were already sold on the team. When I left the team, the concept of turning consumers at any company into fans really intrigued me. Talk about purchase power if we could accomplish just that.

Creating Fans

Guess what: sports teams and rock bands have not cornered the market on fandom. Nike, Porsche, and Coca-Cola are just a few of the bigger brands that have made fans out of their consumers. Your company, no matter how large or small it may be, or whether it sells business-to-consumer or business-to-business, must put a strategy into place to transform your customers into fans. The passion that comes from a new fan is powerful and always leads to significant revenue growth.
CHAPTER 3

BUILDING REVENUE-GENERATING EXTENSIONS

I was sitting in a construction trailer—the temporary marketing offices for the New England Patriots—wedged between Foxboro Stadium and a cement skeleton that would eventually grow into what everyone now knows as Gillette Stadium. One of the premium seating sales reps was coming off a tour of the new stadium with what I understood to be prospective club seat buyers. As the prospects got out of the golf cart, my jaw dropped. I was expecting suits, ties, and wingtips, but no! One of the dudes was wearing a Tedy Bruschi number 54 jersey and a baseball cap. They shook hands with the director of premium seating, David Pearlstein, and I headed out of the trailer to chat with him after they’d left.

I cornered David in the parking lot and started jumping all over him. “David, what the hell is going on here? You can’t be taking fans on tours right now! Why would you waste time with regular fans—they’ll never be able to afford club seats?” At that time, club seats were priced at $3,750, $4,750, and $6,000 per seat with a minimum of a 10-year commitment. David dug in his heels and insisted that these were “real” prospects, but I wanted no part of the explanation. I couldn’t fathom that this was true.

I was wrong—and I probably should say “sorry” here, David.

I grew up in East Boston in a blue-collar family. My grandfather was a laborer, and there was no way that he could have ever afforded club seats, and so there I was, equating blue-collar industries with shallow pockets. But as someone who’d grown beyond that lifestyle and limited means, I of all people should have known better than to judge a book by its cover. These men sporting jerseys may have been blue-collar “regular” season ticket holders, but there was nothing regular about