

Positively Outrageous Service

By T. Scott Gross

Positively Outrageous Service...it's the story you can't wait to tell!

When I set out to discover why other contrarian businesses were growing and prospering in a down economy, I stumbled across the principles of Positively Outrageous Service and POS Marketing. Too simple to be labeled 'secrets' but unusual enough to earn the tag 'outrageous', these principles became the outline for my book, *Positively Outrageous Service*.

My first discovery was that each of these successful contrarians had simply learned how to make their customers say "WOW!"

Wow! I never expected that from an airline! Wow! I never expected that from a theatre or a credit card company or a soft drink supplier, dry cleaner or restaurant!

I discovered that the easiest way to make customers say "WOW" is to get them involved in their own service. Later I learned that by moving our marketing closer to the cash register, our participative service became participative marketing.

Positively Outrageous Service is:

- * Random and unexpected;
- * Out of proportion to the circumstance; and
- * Invites the customer to play.

And when you do it just right, you get:

* Positive, compelling word of mouth.

Is it difficult to deliver? Not at all. Can anyone serve outrageously? Well, yes and no.

My Mont Blanc!

I was given a Mont Blanc pen. Being a rather ordinary person, I had no idea that it was something special, a status symbol of sorts. One day, a Yuppie friend reached toward my shirt saying, "You have a Mont Blanc!"

Not knowing what a Mont Blanc was, I thought he was going to knock a bug off and was surprised when he lifted the pen from my pocket. He explained that a Mont Blanc pen is the latest rage. And I had thought it was just a nice looking, slightly over-sized ballpoint!

It wasn't long before having a Mont Blanc sticking out from my shirt made me feel...well, special.

And then it happened. My Mont Blanc broke.

It broke while I was taking the largest catering order we had ever received. I darned near lost my composure (and the order!) as I wailed, "My Mont Blanc! My Mont Blanc!"

Figuring such a status symbol would certainly include repair service, I bundled up my pen and sent it off. But not before I had removed the refill. Mont Blanc refills are \$4.00 each and I have suits that didn't cost that much!

Within ten days, my Mont Blanc re-appeared. The barrel

had been replaced at absolutely no charge. That's good service.

When I tested the mechanism, much to my chagrin, out poked a new refill! And that is excellent service. But when I moved into the light for a closer look, there, in the same type size and style as originally engraved, were my initials.

Not only did they repair the pen and add a refill but they took the time to match the engraving. Now that's outrageous service!

Here's.....Anna!

For Positively Outrageous Service at its best, a little showmanship is required.

Anna...dear, sweet Anna, would come barreling out of her restaurant's kitchen with a giant meatball speared on a fork.

"Open wide, baby face," she would chuckle as she pinched your chin and popped the meatball into your mouth. "You just had that hungry look and I couldn't resist!" she added. Anna always surprised me with a taste of something special while we waited for her always fabulous meals.

"Anna, can I have a soda, please?"

"Get it yourself. I'm not your mother!"

Anna surprised us, brought us goodies far in excess of what was necessary and made us family. She was a subtle showman, always teasing but leaving us with just enough straight lines to

allow us to fight back playfully.

Anna passed away but she left us a grand-daughter who is just as saucy as she. Anna taught a lot of people how to serve outrageously.

I'd buy another Mont Blanc pen in a heartbeat. And, if you're from San Antonio, you might remember Little Mike's Ice House, Anna's and Mike's legacy.

The Right Time

POS is an idea whose time has come...again. After several decades of mass marketing, the trends are in favor of smart operators who re-focus marketing efforts closer to the Point-Of-Sale.

This is not to say that the days of old-fashioned, person-to-person service have returned entirely. They have not. Economic trends evidenced by the proliferation of discount chains and the mega-muscle of so called 'category killers' make universal service excellence impossible, perhaps even undesirable.

In those instances where the customer views service as important, it will be more of a competitive difference than ever. Quality products will become, in the course of the unfolding decade, the norm. Everyone will provide quality products.

It will be service, Positively Outrageous Service, that will set the winners apart from the crowd.

POS Marketing

Positively Outrageous Service is participative service. POS Marketing is participative marketing.

POS Marketing revolves around four simple tactics designed to involve the customer:

- * Have fun;
- * Create traffic;
- * Involve the product; and
- * Do something good for others.

Customers may enjoy an occasional surprise when they are served but they went wild when we introduced our off-the-wall event-style marketing. (Most, though not

all, of our marketing was a bit tongue-in-cheek, sometimes borderline bizarre.)

Positively Outrageous Service and POS Marketing have made our name synonymous with good food, great service and fun. Noticably absent from our approach was the tactic of deep discounting that seemed to be en vogue. We had taken a different route.

Quality and fun allowed us to charge a fair price for our product and set us apart from our competition.

Here's our vote for Positively Outrageous Service. And cheers to whoever said, "Anyone can give away product. It takes brains to sell it!"

Positively Outrageous Service and POS Marketing. It's the new/old way to win customers—for life!

T. Scott Gross is the author of *OUTRAGEOUS: Unforgettable Service, Guilt-free Selling* (AMACOM, 1998.) Visit his website at tscottgross.com