

The Missing Brand

By T. Scott Gross

To me, a statin is a statin is a statin; you know, a cholesterol lowering drug. But to my doctor, a prominent physician who lives on the cutting edge of research a generic choice was like no choice at all.

So I found myself standing in line at the pharmacy tucked neatly into one corner of the supermarket, waiting in line for that magic pill that the good doctor knew would be the cure-all I needed.

The pharmacy was clean and neat. Plenty of posters and pamphlets surely intended to educate or at least cover someone's legal posterior. The service was fine, nothing remarkable, and the prescription? Ask my doctor in six months.

Oh, did I mention that I called and had the prescription moved? There's a little place a bit out of the way called the Drug Shop. The pharmacist is named Gerry. And the pill? I guess it's the same as the one they dispense at the supermarket.

So what's the difference? Simple. I switched brands. Brands of pharmacists, that is. I switched from the indifferent fellow in the white coat left over from biology lab to the country guy who makes it a point to call me by name, ask where my travels have taken me, and inquire if I'm feeling okay.

The big drug companies have made a huge mistake. Really it was more a sin of omission than commission. They got the drug just right and the marketing gets my attention. The detail folks have given out just the right

number of pens, calendars, and mouse pads. But they forgot to do the final brand tie-in.

Gerry, the pharmacist who comes out from behind the counter is my final and most trusted source of medical information. In some ways he is more influential than my doctor.

When Gerry sits on the edge of the counter and explains to me the nuances of the prescriptions he is filling I feel like price is no longer an issue. And sometimes, I trot myself right back to the doctor in search of an alternative treatment.

The same holds true for the supermarket where we don't purchase prescriptions but where we do all of our grocery shopping. We shop three or four times a week and every time, we drive right past a larger, newer store with what I think are lower prices. My wife calls only one store, 'her store.' Do you think it has something to do with the brand, that statement on the pole sign and plastered to the side of the building?

If you do, you've missed the point.

Her choice has everything to do with brand but only the MicroBrands on the inside. She likes the way the guy in the seafood department always finds time to recommend something new. And she appreciates Dan in the deli who seems to understand her instructions to slice the roast beef 'thin but not too thin.'

She appreciates the free recipe cards, seems attentive

to the product information dotted around the store. But it is the human MicroBrands that apparently have the greatest influence of all.

The Power of Personal Brands

To understand what is at work when it comes to making the buying decision you have know what it is that brands do.

Brands are mental real estate that you own in the mind of the consumer. Every point of experience great enough to leave even a subconscious impression is itself a brand that becomes part of a larger brand.

The produce guy is a brand, a sub-brand or MicroBrand of the supermarket. It is the sum of those MicroBrands that determine the buying decision.

Brands are short-cuts. See the logo. Think the brand. Make the decision without a lot of new thought, just the residual effects of old thoughts, those brand impressions that we often experience without direct awareness.

Brands power purchases in unimagined ways. Powerful brands command higher prices, longer waits, even (sometimes) lower quality.

Now, if you want to promote a brand properly you have to totally integrate your approach to communicating the brand promise. Not just product and promo materials but people too.

Maybe, people especially!