



# Executive Book Summaries®



by Fred Crawford and  
Ryan Mathews

## Why Companies Never Try to Be The Best at Everything

# THE MYTH OF EXCELLENCE

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

If your company tries to succeed at everything, it will wind up succeeding at nothing — so state Fred Crawford and Ryan Mathews in *The Myth of Excellence*. Backed by a bevy of consumer research, the two make the case for organizations to channel their energies toward a specific set of goals in order to reach their target audience with greater efficiency and success.

In the course of its transactions, a company can engage its customers in any one of five attributes: Price, Service, Access, Product or Experience. The authors discuss each one in detail, in conjunction with their Conceptual Model of Consumer Relevancy — a three-level hierarchy that dictates the length, breadth and depth of a customer-company business relationship in the following terms:

**Acceptance.** At bare minimum, a business wants its customers to accept their products or services as par for their market and make routine transactions with them. While this is an acceptable level of doing business, there is little effort on either side to maintain a sense of loyalty.

**Preference.** When a company deepens the level of respect, access and quality in a customer relationship, customers tend to grow to prefer that company over others. This is accomplished because the company has differentiated itself from competitors that achieve mere acceptance in the market.

**Seeking.** When a consumer not only prefers a company, but seeks out its products and services above all others, the company has achieved the ideal state of relationship with its customer.

Companies cannot, however, successfully achieve the third (seeking) status for each of the five transactional attributes — no organization possesses sufficient resources to succeed. You must determine the attributes your customers prefer best, and gear your efforts toward achieving the appropriate Relevancy level for each attribute — for example, the *seeking* level for attributes that are most important and acceptance for less important attributes.

*The Myth of Excellence* shows you how.



## CONTENTS

### Align Commerce with Values

Pages 2, 3

### A Conceptual Model For Customer Relevance

Pages 3, 4

### Price Can Be a Major Attribute — But Not The Only One

Pages 4, 5

### Service with a Smile?

Page 5

### Access: Physical and Psychological

Page 6

### Product Bandwidth: Why 'Good' Is Good Enough

Pages 6, 7

### The Experience Factor

Page 8

# THE MYTH OF EXCELLENCE

by Fred Crawford and Ryan Mathews

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### Align Commerce with Values

Many companies and pundits alike work under the assumption that consumers are chiefly concerned with purchasing the very best goods at the lowest possible price, and receiving plenty of value-added services, to boot. In truth, consumers are looking for values, not just value. They want recognition as human beings, not just a 30 percent discount.

Indeed, there are three key societal changes — all occurring at once — that drive consumers to crave something different, a change in the relative weighting we assign to the context of a transaction. Those factors are:

- **Societal devolution.** Traditional institutions have become less able to adequately reflect fundamental human values. As individuals, we unconsciously seek out reinforcement and ratification of our personal values, rewarding commercial institutions that are smart enough to build those values into their offerings.

- **Increased inability to keep pace with daily life.** We work too much; we're stressed out; depression is becoming more prevalent than heart disease. It is clear that expectations are rising, yet we are falling further behind.

- **Proliferation of increasingly intrusive information and communication technologies.** We are hit from all sides with information and commercial imagery, on television, the Internet and other means, which has left us better informed, but less aware.

### Kmart's High Fashion Faux Pas

Sometimes, companies try desperately to excel in an area that consumers don't want. Several years ago, Kmart made a famously misguided attempt to make its line of clothing more upscale. As part of that campaign, the retailer began offering higher-priced Gitano designer jeans, a move that flopped because consumers didn't believe designer clothes could be sold at Kmart prices. Gitano, too, felt the full force of the miscalculation — damaging its standing with upscale customers who didn't believe any brand sold at Kmart could carry high-fashion cachet.

It was a case in which customers believed that *low cost* plus *high fashion* equaled *low quality*. Whether the jeans were a good value never entered into the equation.

### Aligning the Commercial Context

As a result of the convergence of these factors, consumers want the commercial context to be aligned with human values. This alignment is *Consumer Relevancy*, which is based on three foundations:

- **Human values are the contemporary currency of commerce.** Businesses that address human needs that are typically ignored elsewhere are well positioned to take shares from competitors.

- **Human values determine commercial value.** While inferior quality in products will not be tolerated by consumers, product quality alone is not enough. Companies that address human values will have greater opportunities for differentiation, branding and building loyalty.

- **Values are more important than value to consumers.** Today, differentiation is found in the manner in which a product or service is rendered, through the lens of human values.

### Focusing on Attributes

With these things in mind (and with research gleaned from a survey of 5,000 consumers), the authors came to the conclusion that every business transaction — from the simplest sale of goods to the most complex service offering — can be broken down into five attributes

1. Price
2. Service
3. Access
4. Experience
5. Product

While many companies attempt to excel at all five, none (not even retail giant Wal-Mart) are capable of being great at everything, yet this myth of excellence

(continued on page 3)

**The authors:** Fred Crawford is an executive vice president with Cap Gemini Ernst & Young. Ryan Mathews is a futurist with FirstMatter, a Westport, Conn.-based futuring consultancy.

Copyright© 2001 by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young U.S. LLC. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Crown Business, 299 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10171. 252 pages. \$27.50. 0-609-60820-7.

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. V. P. Publications, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$195 per year in U.S., Canada & Mexico, and \$275 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to Soundview, 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2001 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

**Available formats:** Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-521-1227 (1-610-558-9495 outside U.S. & Canada), or order on the Internet at [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com). Multiple-subscription discounts and Corporate Site Licenses are also available.

### Align Commerce with Values

*(continued from page 2)*

pervades the culture. Even if a given company could excel in all five areas, it would have trouble communicating a clear value proposition to consumers.

Companies must instead select an attribute that defines their primary field of competition (the one in which they want to dominate), homing in on the one that their target consumers value the most.

Finding out what attributes and values you ought to embody is relatively easy — you must talk to your customers in their language and be open to what they tell you. Once you've got the message, it must form the cornerstone of everything you do that touches the customer — no exceptions, no short-term deviations, no panic if sales dip in a quarter. Those values must permeate your culture, as well as your product offerings — a fact that is easier said than done in these competitive times. ■

### A Conceptual Model For Consumer Relevancy

From the seller's perspective, the relationships between consumers and businesses haven't changed all that much from the days of the 19th century country store. Whereas the country store owner got to know his customers through countless interactions (enabling him to anticipate and meet their needs), today's businesses have technology on their side, to track purchases and deliver goods specifically tailored to the needs of consumers.

#### *The Five Transaction Attributes*

If things haven't changed that much, why do customers seem so upset? Part of the answer is that while the essential transactional infrastructure (the five basic attributes of commerce) appears the same over time, the specific meaning of those attributes has been radically transformed. This has affected those attributes in the following ways:

- **Price.** Consumers — regardless of income level, geographic location and/or education — are less concerned with getting the lowest price than they are with getting a fair and honest price. They want a price that is consistent and that doesn't appear to have been artificially increased or decreased at the expense of other things they want to buy. Business brags about cheap, but people value honest.

- **Service.** Time after time, companies fall over themselves to provide “value-added” services for consumers in one area, while failing to provide even basic service in others. All those special services mean little if a company cannot successfully serve customers' basic, every-

day requests.

- **Access.** Today, consumers care more about navigation (physical and psychological) than mere geographic location. Getting to a business is far less important than getting what they want once they've arrived.

- **Product.** Just because businesses believe their products are the best doesn't necessarily mean you're dominating your customers' consciousness. A vast majority of consumers indicate that a consistently good product is more desirable than a single best offering. In other words, “good enough” is good enough for most consumers.

- **Experience.** Intimacy matters. Consumers want respect, to be treated like a human being (not a human purchase order), and to be offered unique products or services, a demand that stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical used car salesman trying to trick people into buying more car than they need.

#### *The Four Relationship Levels*

There is another dimension to the consumer/seller relationship — a hierarchy of interaction that dictates four potential levels at which the two parties meet and transact business. Where a company falls in this hierarchy depends on how well it listens to consumers, truly understands what they are looking for, and satisfies their needs. The levels in this Conceptual Model are as follows:

- **Consumer Underworld.** There exists a deep distrust on the part of consumers as a result of real or perceived disrespect or lack of accommodation at the hands of the company in question. No company wants to be at this “negative” level.

- **Level I: Consumer accepts the company.** This is the threshold at which a company represents par for a particular market or business — honest pricing, credible products, accommodating service, easy access and respect for customers. In a Level I relationship, consumers are willing to make routine transactions with the company, but there is little sense of loyalty either way.

- **Level II: Consumer prefers the company.** At this level, consumers actually prefer one store or brand over another. This typically takes place when the company makes access to its facilities, product, Web site, etc., convenient; shows respect at a personal level; clearly presents consistent prices; offers reliable, good quality products; and is able to educate consumers on the use of a product or service. To hit Level II, you must find ways to differentiate yourself from competitors, building a degree of trust sufficient to cause consumers to prefer doing business with them.

- **Level III: Consumer seeks the company.** This is the ideal state of interaction, in which the consumer not

*(continued on page 4)*

### A Conceptual Model for Consumer Relevancy

(continued from page 3)

only prefers one company over others, but actively seeks out the company of choice. These companies find ways to dominate their markets, to separate themselves from the pack, to move consumers into lifestyle relationships, in which the company becomes the source that customers appoint to make all the right decisions.

#### Customer Relevancy

How do these levels interact with and add clarity to the five customer-centric categories to create a consumer-relevant company? Truly consumer-relevant companies do not attempt to dominate in every one of the five categories; they overcome the constant temptation to strive for universal excellence (or Level III standing), instead deciding upon which attribute they want to compete.

In addition to choosing a primary attribute, highly consumer-relevant companies select a second (Level II) attribute that serves as a strong complement and further differentiates them from competitors. Finally, those companies must not fall below par (Level I) in any of the other categories; many companies overlook this critically important point.

Thus, for example, a company might strive for Level III on product, Level II on service and Level I on price, access and experience. ■

### Price Can Be a Major Attribute — But Not the Only One

Dominating on price doesn't necessarily mean having the absolute lowest cost — it means consistently offering customers fair and honest pricing. Indeed, while most consumer businesses appear happy to compete ferociously on the basis of cost of goods or services — under the contention that their customers really want the lowest prices available — in most circumstances they're just flat wrong.

Absolute lowest price may continue to be important to some segment of the population, but it will be just one factor in the purchase-decision process for the vast majority of consumers. In many cases, price will actually be a less significant factor than it has been, because most consumers find themselves more rushed and time-starved than ever before.

While many current (and deceased) Internet businesses treat lowest price as their key factor, the typical consumer business in the non-virtual world must recognize the multidimensional aspects of price, that, in fact, it takes more than simply offering low prices to attract consumers.

On the surface, Dollar General Corp. (the Nashville-

based retailer catering to low- and fixed-income consumers) is clearly a consumer business that aims to dominate on price. Get below that shell, however, and you see that price is only its primary (Level III) attribute; it also focuses on access (as its Level II attribute) to differentiate its stores from other general goods outlets, such as Wal-Mart. And it operates at par in terms of service and experience.

#### Dollar General's Level III Attribute: Price

Dollar General is able to excel at price in part because its strategy is rooted in several crucial factors, including the following:

- **Cash and carry.** The chain does not accept credit cards, eliminating the two- to six-percent fees charged by credit card companies, as well as expensive credit card verification systems.

- **No advertising.** You will never see a Dollar General sales circular in your local paper, unless a new store is opening in your area. The company also avoids all radio and TV advertisements, as well.

- **Mixing of brands.** Dollar General offers a mix of brands that enables the company to provide consistently good quality at as low a price as possible. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of its items are well-known national brands; an equal portion consists of the chain's own DG Signature label products. The remainder of the products offered consist of various labels exclusive to Dollar General that meet the company's high standards of quality.

- **Simple, no glitz stores.** The company's store units are decidedly unglamorous, but that suits management and customers alike just fine.

- **Quality labor force.** The company taps its own customer base and leverages its stores locales to find the best employees it can, at reasonable wages.

#### Dollar General's Level II Attribute: Access

Dollar General can differentiate itself from competitors on the factor of access by maintaining the following attributes:

- **Small footprint.** At about 7,000 square feet, the typical Dollar General store is smaller than its competitor's outlets.

- **Eye-level focus.** In every Dollar General store, nothing — fixtures, signs, merchandise, etc. — is above eye level. Customers standing in the store entrance have an unobstructed view of the entire store without having to wander around.

- **Streamlined checkout.** Dollar General keeps checkout lines moving by employing price scanners and removing impulse buy items (gum, candy, etc.) from its front-end area.

(continued on page 5)

### Price Can Be a Major Attribute — But Not the Only One

(continued from page 4)

● **Limited choices.** The company keeps a tight reign on its inventory, limiting itself to just 4500 stock keeping units, or SKUs (Wal-Mart, by contrast, offers more than eight times that many), keeping stock from crowding the stores and inconveniencing customers who don't want to wade through too many choices.

● **Convenient location.** Although access is typically defined as internal navigation, a nice store means little if customers can't get to it. Dollar General tries to locate its units in the heart of small towns or on major public transit lines in larger cities. ■

### Service with a Smile?

Service is all about people — the element of human-to-human interaction is what most clearly defines the service attribute in a business. Unlike product or price, service is a living, breathing dynamic, experienced by individuals in a very personal way. Since employees are the touch points between a company and its customers, the mechanisms companies use to motivate their employees are a critical part of how their customers experience service.

Historically, companies have considered service to be something they offered to consumers; however, as attitudes toward service have shifted, that viewpoint has changed. Now, consumers regard service as something a business embodies. They differentiate among various kinds of service a company can offer — before, during and after transactions. They recognize the close relationship between service and experience; it's not so much what you offer, but how you offer it that makes the difference in a service situation.

Businesses that want to compete on service as their primary attribute, or even those that wish to simply bring their service component up to industry standards, must listen carefully to the voice of the consumer.

#### Levels of Service

The hierarchy of interaction would work as follows:

● **Level I.** The first level for service is *accommodation* — meeting the fundamental expectations of the consumer. To be accommodated, customers must feel as if they are respected and treated fairly by the company's personnel, and that employees take seriously any dissatisfaction they might have with a purchase. Companies must focus on hiring and training salespeople and customer service representatives who are committed to serving customers first and foremost.

### Superquinn Keeps Customers Coming Back

Superquinn isn't just an Irish supermarket chain; in the words of one employee, it's a cult. Every employee, most of the customers, and the company's management are all dedicated to the chain's primary competitive attribute — service. Here's how they do it:

✓ **They do the simple things right.** Superquinn never forgets to do the little things to make customers happy. All its stores have a greeter posted at the store entrance, not only to make a good first impression, but also to help customers get situated in the store so they can go about their business. Store managers, also, are a constant presence on the floor; they can often be seen doing their paperwork at empty registers, on shelves, etc. — all in the name of remaining accessible to customers.

✓ **They go the extra mile.** While many retailers hide their complaint department, Superquinn places its service counter right at the entrance of the store, powerfully communicating the value the chain puts in addressing its customers' comments and complaints. The company will also stock special items for specific customers, even if only a competitor carries that item.

✓ **They exceed customer expectations.** While there are many points of difference between Superquinn and its competitors, some programs are clearly light years ahead of anything most other retailers will do for their customers. One such program is the company's child-care service — each store is equipped with a supervised playhouse area where customers can leave their children to play, free of charge. Another program is the SuperClub customer loyalty program, which enables customers to accumulate points good toward the purchase of merchandise at Superquinn's partner companies.

● **Level II.** At the second level, consumers want *education* — information about products and services. They want their questions answered by employees who are well trained, knowledgeable and friendly.

● **Level III.** Businesses aiming to excel at the service attribute must offer the consumer individualized *customization* of the product or service. This customization can be a tricky proposition, however; if you make a mistake, it can have a terribly negative effect on your standing with customers. A good example of customization gone wrong might be a direct mail campaign, seemingly customized with your name and address, but with one or both misspelled. ■

### Access: Physical and Psychological

For decades, companies have defined access by the age-old real estate adage of “location, location, location.” However, a new definition of access is starting to win over today’s consumers, a definition that has less to do with physical location and everything to do with *psychological* access — specifically, the perception of being able to easily and successfully navigate the physical area of a business and find what you’re looking for. Dollar General, while dominating on price, has also successfully captured this notion of access, with the uniform, easily navigated layout of each and every one of its stores.

The lesson to be learned for a consumer business is the fact that there is a pot of gold awaiting the retailer or service provider that can create a sense of connectivity and community — that is, psychological access — as a means of differentiation. They must recognize that

#### Running Circles Around Access

Circles, a Boston-based personal services company that offers a virtual concierge service, helps its customers find just about anything they want (from restaurants to cars to virtually any kind of shopping), offering access, literally, to a world of products and services. Through offering such a wide array of solutions to customer needs, Circles shows businesses how they, too, can excel at the attribute of access:

- ✓ **Take care of your customers’ customers.** You can’t access Circles if you’re an individual customer, but you can if you’re a customer of one of Circles’ client companies, including Razorfish, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, Hyperion and nearly 75 other corporations. These companies know that, in competitive job markets, offering perks to employees, such as contracting with a personal services company, is an effective way to build employee loyalty. The exclusivity of Circles’ access also makes its services more valuable.
- ✓ **Help others achieve balance.** By helping customers take care of little things (hiring a dog walker, getting tickets to an event, etc.), Circles enables those customers to find time for other pursuits outside those associated with work or day-to-day chores.
- ✓ **Hire and train properly.** Providing access excellence is impossible without the right people. Circles has 250 professionals in its employ, including 150 highly trained personal assistants.

their customers likely rush through their lives, accompanied by more acquaintances than friends; these customers need a sense of connection and of community affiliation, and, very often, find neither.

This non-physical access — or, for lack of a better term, “higher” access — is key to successfully dominating or differentiating your business on the attribute of access. The Conceptual Model for access, then, would look something like the following:

- **Level I.** At this basic threshold of competing on access, consumers are saying, “Make it *easy* for me to find what I need, and to get in and out of your store or location in a hurry.”
- **Level II.** At this level of consumer preference, consumers are telling businesses to make the experience *convenient* for them.
- **Level III.** At the level in which consumers actively seek a company, they define access not only in terms of ease and convenience, but also in terms of whether that business provides *solutions* to their lifestyle problems, or offers that psychological sense of *connectivity* and community.

If your organization wants to excel at access, ask yourself some key questions:

- Are you offering your customers a real solution to their needs (for example, arranging extra shipments or “shopping” the competition for last-minute purchases)?
- How convenient is it to do business with you? Do you, for example, use available technology wisely, in order to enhance your customers’ ability to engage your business?
- How easy is it for your customers to get the goods or services they’re looking for?
- If you have a Web site, do you respond to customer communications in real time, or only once a day?
- Are you willing to go to the customer if need be, or do you insist they come to you? ■

### Product Bandwidth: Why ‘Good’ Is Good Enough

As with most of the attributes, product has a multitude of dimensions; chief among them are quality, breadth and depth. Companies that choose to compete on the basis of product must determine the most appropriate mix of these three elements.

At a basic level, a company must set the quality bar for its products, selecting a product “quality range” that strikes an appropriate balance of “good, better or best,”

(continued on page 7)

### Product Bandwidth: Why ‘Good’ Is Good Enough

(continued from page 6)

depending on the needs of the consumer audience it is targeting. These companies will find themselves answering several important questions immediately:

- **Will we offer the most innovative products made to exacting specifications (which are, consequently, very expensive)?**
- **Will we go for items that are of lower quality but are more affordable to a larger pool of consumers?**
- **Will we strike a balance, somewhere between high and lower quality?**

Research points to a certain emotional-commitment range associated with product quality — a range that runs from disposability on one end to attachment on the other. Of course, this attachment depends largely on the individual; consumers who have an emotional attachment to a particular product tend to spend time researching and shopping for that product, before actually making a purchase.

#### **Breadth and Depth**

Breadth and depth are also key aspects of the product attribute. Companies choosing to compete on product must decide whether they intend to have the deepest selection of products in their category of choice (such as Toys R Us or Staples) or the broadest assortment of items for their market (like Target or The Home Depot). Ultimately, however, the growth of online business will make product depth an increasingly difficult strategy on which to dominate in the brick-and-mortar world; this will likely lead to product depth increasing as a virtual business strategy, as it becomes the key differentiating factor for many businesses.

#### **The Three Levels of Product**

When applying the Conceptual Model to “product,” it is necessary to recognize the first demand consumers will make of a business’ product — *credibility*. In order to get to Level I, companies must offer a product that meets basic expectations and a minimum threshold of utility. A cheap wrench, for example, must still be able to loosen a rusted nut.

To get to Level II, businesses must guarantee the *reliability* of their products — consistently good merchandise and a low out-of-stock condition. Consumers will prefer your business if your products do what they purport to do, whether you’re FedEx delivering overnight, or Maytag keeping its repairmen bored by making washers that don’t break down. The perception of reliability is a principal result of successful branding and the

### Record Time: Becoming the Product

Record Time, a Detroit-based independent music store, has lasted more than 20 years in a progressive, competitive market by excelling at the primary attribute of product — offering customers the music they want, when they want it, regardless of whether they desire a Top Ten hit or the most obscure record by a niche artist. In order to outlast major competitors (such as Best Buy, Borders, Media Play and the like), the store’s owner, Mike Himes, keenly observes several key guidelines:

- ✓ **Give the people what they want.** Record Time inspires customers by offering them recordings by cutting-edge artists that they can’t find anywhere else.
- ✓ **Hire knowledge.** Himes hires only salespeople who are themselves deeply involved with music, either as artists, DJs, or just devoted fans.
- ✓ **Know your limits.** Hip-hop and alternative music are Record Time’s bread and butter; as a result, the store stocks a lot of artists in those genres, and very little in other genres (like country or classical) that are unpopular with the store’s target market of 15-to-30-year-olds.
- ✓ **Provide a community experience.** Record Time has a separate “Dance Room,” where customers can listen to product and hang out with other aficionados.
- ✓ **Encourage local talent.** Himes regularly features live, in-store performances by local artists. He has also sponsored certain artists by distributing their music himself, with minimal (if any) record company support.

expectation that such brands will always perform consistently.

Businesses that achieve Level III provide not only credibility and reliability, but also *inspiration*. They carry products that are unique, unusual or difficult to find — items that inspire the consumer to aspire to a higher level of lifestyle. Companies like Tiffany or Rolex provide this level of inspiration. That inspiration also extends to businesses that are not on the higher-end of the scale — companies like The Home Depot or Ikea, which attract repeat customers with their range of products or stylish designs. Clearly, these businesses understand their customers’ product quality and price thresholds, but they also paint the picture of an inspiring lifestyle, in which their products play a starring role. ■

(continued on page 8)

### The Experience Factor

Experience may be the most difficult attribute at which to excel, in part because it is possibly the most misunderstood.

Many businesses often make the mistake of equating experience with entertainment — and entertainment alone — rather than seeing the latter as an augmentation to an already solid offer and a contributor to the consumer's experience. The allure of entertainment — of style over substantive experience or a value proposition — wears off after a while. Think of all the themed restaurants that once seemed so prevalent and experience-oriented, but which actually substituted glitz for value. Has anyone eaten at a Fashion Café lately?

#### *Two Kinds of Experience*

In much the same way that there are two kinds of access — physical and psychological — there are also two types of experience: the external, or entertainment, experience; and the internal experience, which is tied to the feeling a consumer has about doing business with a company. The distinction between the two has largely to do with how the business in question engages the customer, and the associated experience that transpires as a result of that engagement — how the customer feels; whether he or she is treated with respect; whether he or she feels valued; etc.

#### *The Three Levels of Experience*

To compete on experience successfully, businesses must consider the implications for experience, as denoted in the Conceptual Model:

- At Level I, consumers simply want to be treated as human beings. They demand respect, or they will shop your competition for the products and services they need.
- At Level II, the relationship between consumer and business deepens to include care. In addition to the attitudes of employees, care also encompasses environmental factors — signage, music, employee dress, etc. — that constitute the business' image. After all, if a company doesn't care about the image it relays to its customers, how can it purport to care about the customers themselves?
- Level III is the customer-affirming experience, in which the consumer feels a close bond with the company — a degree of intimacy, interaction and trust that leads to a long-term relationship. The consumer believes the company has his or her best interests at heart, respects him or her, and cares more about his or her needs than simply making a sale. ■

### The Campbell Bewley Experience

If you speak of coffee or tea in Dublin, chances are you're speaking of (or inside) a Bewley's coffeehouse — such is the standing of the company in Ireland and modern Irish culture. From the stately appearance and decor of each of the company's 30 cafes to the professionalism and friendliness of each outlet's staff, Bewley (and its parent company, Campbell Bewley Group) offers an experience that is unique among coffee shops anywhere in the world — an atmosphere and product that has become synonymous with Dublin itself.

How does Bewley do it?

- ✓ **By attending to details.** The physical structure of each Bewley cafe is a paragon of consistency and warmth — high ceilings, mahogany walls, stained glass windows, an open fire and red upholstery are as much a part of the Bewley's experience as coffee and tea.
- ✓ **By doing staffing their way.** Bewley's operates without a wait staff, which management feels encourages customers to relax and hang out, without feeling rushed by someone asking them if they need anything. The people the company does employ must complete a series of training seminars and gain a certain amount of experience on the floor to move up the positional hierarchy (from trainee to shift leader). That hierarchy is visually represented by colored nametags that both alert customers to the capabilities and authority of a given worker, and give those workers something to which they can strive in their time as Bewley employees.
- ✓ **By communicating to customers.** Customers are treated to an array of hints (both subtle and overstated) of what they can expect at a Bewley's cafe — friendly staff, clean tables, etc. Customers are also alerted a week in advance to any changes that might be taking place — a particularly important communiqué for regular customers.
- ✓ **By doing what customers tell them to do.** Bewley's management believes that the only way to keep giving people what they want is to listen to customers and do what they say. The company solicits input — both positive and negative — via comment cards at every location. The feedback from those comment cards is taken seriously and acted upon immediately; employees who receive praise are rewarded immediately, and managers are evaluated on their outlet's feedback monthly.