



Executive Book Summaries®

www.summary.com

Bonus
Summary

Overpromise and Overdeliver

How to Design and Deliver Extraordinary Customer Experiences (Revised Edition)

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

How did extraordinary companies such as Apple, Pottery Barn, American Girl and Zipcar come out of nowhere to virtually take over their respective markets from bigger and wealthier competitors? Not by spending a fortune on marketing. All they did was keep their promises — dangerously ambitious promises. These companies used a radical new formula: They *overpromised* to lure customers in and then *overdelivered* to keep them.

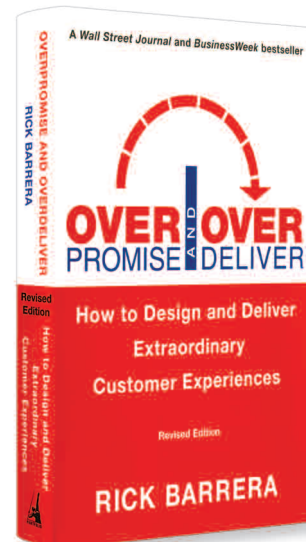
In *Overpromise and Overdeliver*, marketing guru Rick Barrera uses groundbreaking research and case studies to show how these word-of-mouth-driven successes have mastered what he calls TouchPoint Branding — the art of making sure that every point of contact between a company and its customers is well executed and fulfills an over-the-top brand promise. Barrera explains how aligning three types of customer contacts — Product TouchPoints, System TouchPoints and Human TouchPoints — can create dramatic market differentiation.

The companies featured in this summary start with an extraordinary product supported by smoothly running systems and add satisfying human contact.

In a crowded business environment in which everyone seems to be shouting the same message at peak volume, overpromising and overdelivering is the best way to stand out.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to use an approach that turns also-rans into winners.
- How to craft your own unique overpromise based on a complete understanding of your market.
- How to take full advantage of the primary points of interaction between a company and its customers.
- How anyone can create extraordinary customer experiences.



by Rick Barrera

CONTENTS

Overachievers Overpromise
Page 2

What's a Brand Overpromise?
Page 3

How Do You Build Your Overcompromise?
Page 4

How Do You Optimize Your Product TouchPoints?
Page 5

How Do You Optimize Your System TouchPoints?
Page 6

How Do You Optimize Your Human TouchPoints?
Page 6

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

by Rick Barrera

The author: Rick Barrera is the CEO of Overpromise Inc., a consulting firm that helps companies of all sizes build differentiated brands and create extraordinary customer experiences. Barrera is also the co-author of *Collaborative Selling* and *Non-Manipulative Selling*.

Overpromise and Overdeliver: How to Design and Deliver Extraordinary Customer Experiences (Revised Edition) by Rick Barrera. Copyright © 2005, 2009 by Rick Barrera. Summarized by arrangement with Portfolio, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 226 pages, \$25.95 ISBN 978-1-59184-268-2. To purchase this book, go to www.amazon.com or www.bn.com.

Summary copyright © 2009 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY, 1-610-558-9495.

For additional information on the author, go to <http://www.summary.com>.

INTRODUCTION

By definition, an overpromise is a pledge to deliver a product or service that is radically different and has more relevance to your targeted customers than anything your rivals are touting. When you follow up on your already world-beating proposition by also overdelivering on it, you further multiply the distance between you and your competitors.

How do you go about overdelivering on your brand overpromise? The secret is to get all three of your customer contact points — product, system and human, called TouchPoints — aligned and focused on the goal of delivering extraordinary customer experiences.

The Importance of Overdelivering

Let's assume that your overpromise is all about ease of use. Your espresso maker, let's say, will do the job it is designed to do with no fuss or bother, without having to resort to flipping through a manual, changing a brew setting, grinding beans, measuring and tamping the grind and cleaning up spills and drips after the coffee is extracted. The Product TouchPoint that specifically delivers that overpromise is your prepackaged coffee pod. All a customer has to do is pop in the coffee packet, push the switch and — presto — steaming espresso flows into the cup.

The espresso maker may be a huge hit with your customers, but if you want the kudos to keep coming and your competitors to keep lagging, you must align your System and Human TouchPoints to deliver the same level of great experience customers get from your Product TouchPoints. That means you must make sure that users of your machine can easily obtain the

prepackaged coffee that supports the overpromise. If the packets must be ordered by phone or via the Internet (a System TouchPoint), you'd better see to it that the ordering system is accessible 24/7 and that it's fast, efficient, accurate and easy to navigate. If you use live operators (a Human TouchPoint), they must be quick to answer a call, patient, pleasant and well-trained in taking mistake-free orders.

The first time a customer can't use your machine because an order of the prepackaged coffee packets is lost or delayed, your long-term success is endangered. Next thing you know, that espresso maker will end up on a basement shelf alongside a raft of other once-wonderful gadgets and appliances. In other words, if either your System or Human TouchPoints prevent you from overdelivering, your overpromise loses its punch.

The Rules for Overdelivering

Whether your company is big or small, the rules for overdelivering on your overpromise are the same: You must have an unwavering willingness to lift up your brand by polishing your TouchPoints to perfection and infusing them with the same surpassing qualities that define your overpromise.

Any organization, no matter its size or its mission, has the power to overpromise and overdeliver.

PART ONE: OVERPROMISE

Overachievers Overpromise

Zipcar is a company that provides a new twist on an old service: It rents vehicles by the hour rather than the day.

In 2003, four years after Zipcar was founded, it had



1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year.
Copyright © 2010 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

Available formats: Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (240-912-7513 outside the United States), or order online at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Andrew Clancy, Senior Editor; Edward O'Neill, Graphic Designer; Chris Lauer, Contributing Editor

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

placed dozens of vehicles in parking lots or gas stations in Boston, New York and Washington, D.C. To reserve a car, members logged onto Zipcar.com, chose their pickup time and car model, then walked to the closest lot. A wave of their Zipcard across the windshield unlocked the car; the ignition key was inside. Then off they drove, with everything covered — including insurance and gas — by a low hourly fee and mileage charge.

Today, Zipcar has grown at an incredible pace: from 150 cars in three cities to 5,500 cars in 50 cities; from 4,000 members to 225,000; from revenues of \$2 million to more than \$100 million. And the company continues to grow at a double-digit rate each year.

Promises Made and Topped

Part of what makes companies like Zipcar and others so successful is their ability to craft unique, attention-grabbing promises that radically differentiate them from their competitors. These companies don't just promise, they overpromise — and they align key elements of their organizations to overdeliver.

Zipcar offers to give people “wheels when you want them,” and with less aggravation and expense than anyone else. American Girl promises dolls that enchant girls and teach them how to live a life of substance. Servpro makes sure that franchisees have the best training and overall preparation in the restoration field. And in a crowded business environment in which everyone seems to be shouting the same message simultaneously at peak volume, exciting, breakthrough overpromises like these are the best way to stand out from the crowd.

An overpromise must have two characteristics. First, it must be radically different from competitors' pledges. Second, it must be highly relevant to customers.

Establishing Brand Overpromises

New companies must develop unique brand overpromises to battle their way into the marketplace. Established businesses, faced with fighting off upstarts and differentiating themselves from rivals, have to periodically overhaul their brand promises to adjust to changes in markets, competitors and customers. After brand overpromises have been established, leaders must get their entire organizations aligned to deliver flawlessly on those promises and, above all, consistently every day with every sale or interaction.

Why? Because a promise is, by definition, a serious commitment — a pledge to do or deliver something by a particular time, without fail.

By overpromising, you put your whole reputation for honesty on the line. It says that you are confident your

brand will perform at a level beyond your competitor's and you've made a solemn contract with hundreds of thousands or millions of customers. If even a few customers find you reneging, their contempt may well spread like a California wildfire. A wise leader knows that trust is the hard currency of business success. The price for squandering trust — sabotaging a brand's covenant with customers — is always too high to pay. ●

What's a Brand Overpromise?

A generic promise has no meaning to the customer. It has to be specific, and outstanding; it needs to be an overpromise. First, discover who your potential customers really are. Second, tell them how your product or service is different and why they should buy it. Third, align your TouchPoints to do exactly what you promise, in other words, overdeliver — always.

How? Brilliantly. Your investors and employees deserve nothing less.

Back to Basics

How do you develop an overpromise for a business or brand? As with just about every successful venture in life, it has to start with the basics. In this case, that means truly understanding the meaning of “brand.”

The great adman David Ogilvy defined brand as “the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging and price, its history, its reputation and the way it's advertised.” A brand may also denote the product's purchasing experience, financing, ease of use, after-sales support, warranty and lasting value.

Brands carry emotional impact; they connect with a customer's identity and deep aspirations. They can speak to a buyer's personality, communicate his or her social status and fulfill deep-seated emotional needs. In the end, your brand sets you apart from the competition by the values and attributes your customers believe a particular product or service possesses and conveys, including its origins and associations.

Defining the Overpromise

A brand overpromise expresses all the things that set a brand apart from the competition, all the characteristics that make it distinctive. But some people confuse brand promises with vision and mission statements, when in actuality they have little in common.

Vision and mission statements are usually created for the benefit of employees, investors and other stakeholders and are intended to define the organization's competitive space, purpose and goals. A brand overpromise

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

is specifically for customers and is built around a product or service. Vision and mission statements may resemble an overpromise in that they signal to customers how the organization will conduct itself, and that's certainly important. But this benefit is only incidental to the real purpose of the statement.

A true overpromise should describe what the product or service will do for your target audience, how it is different from competing offers and why a potential customer should buy it. An effective overpromise sums up the essence of the brand. Whether simple or profound, the overpromise must be so radically different from what everyone else in the market is promising that the customer hears you even though you aren't shouting. In other words, great overpromises cut through the chatter because they speak directly to customers about an issue that matters deeply to them. ●

How Do You Build Your Overpromise?

A winning overpromise — whether it's brand-new or a rejuvenated version of a previous promise — isn't born of a sudden flash of inspiration. If it is to truly differentiate you, it must be built piece by piece. Attention must be paid not only to the intricacies of products and services, manufacturing and marketing, but to all the constituencies that must be on board to achieve a breakthrough. That means current and potential customers, employees, shareholders, distributors and suppliers. After all, you will have to live with the overpromise for some time; align all TouchPoints with it; arrange the entire organization around it; and overdeliver on it. All stakeholders whose suggestions and support have an impact on your company's success must be part of the conversation.

To begin the journey to a complete understanding of your existing brand promise, consider the questions that follow:

• **What is the essence of your business? Why was the company started? What was the founder's vision? What did he or she plan to do better than anyone else? Are you fulfilling that vision now?**

This first line of questioning is a way to get the coordinates, to zero in on the real reason so much of your life is being devoted to making the organization you work for work.

• **What are your brand's most important attributes? What do customers think of when they hear your company's name?** Customers' attitudes have been influenced by word of mouth, by advertising and

Sherwin-Williams Keeps It Simple

Cleveland-based Sherwin-Williams kept its brand overpromise simple when it created a new plastic container for its Dutch Boy paint. The new container obliterated the inconvenience and aggravation of the old ones. How? With its twist-off lid and no-drip spout, the "Twist & Pour" simplified an unnecessarily messy and complex job. Customers couldn't get the improved product quickly enough.

public relations, by their feelings toward the store where they bought the product or perhaps by a conversation with customer service personnel.

• **Why do customers buy your product or service? Why don't they buy your competitor's product or service?** Asking customers why they buy from you can help to identify the kinds of people who are best served by your product or service. Chances are, they won't be the ones that were in mind when the brand promise was created.

• **Why don't non-customers buy your product or service? Why do they buy your competitor's?** Learning that some aspect of an overpromise, or of its supporting products and processes, is driving away a substantial number of potential customers should inspire some serious repair work.

• **What emotions do customers feel when they buy and use your product?** Pottery Barn's overpromise is more laden with emotion than most because it sells products for the home, a place that people care about deeply. Pottery Barn's overpromise acknowledges that furnishing and decorating a home can be stressful by presenting the company as a kind of home decorating mentor.

• **If your brand was a person, how would you describe him or her? In the same vein, how would you describe each of your competitors?** Think about the market in which you sell and your target customers.

• **How do your employees perceive your brand?** Nothing is more important to a company's success than convincing employees to invest more rather than less, because what you are after is their discretionary efforts on behalf of your brand.

Putting It All Together

Here are the questions you really want the answers to: What is your reputation? What are you known for?

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

What one thing about your company most matters to customers? Then build your overpromise around it.

If you don't like the answers to these questions, you'll need to think deeply about what you want to be known for in the future and how your overpromise will articulate that clearly to customers and potential customers. You'll then be able to tackle the work of realigning each of your TouchPoints to overdeliver on your overpromise. ●

How Do You Make Your Brand Overpromise Unique?

An overpromise is by definition unique, and that requires a bright idea — a differentiating characteristic. The bright idea will be the product of your deepening understanding of overpromises and the work you do to find out what your customers really want.

Adopt a special attitude toward brainstorming the right bright idea. Set aside the caution you apply when making decisions on weighty issues. A more freewheeling approach is needed. The purpose of the exercise is to free your imagination.

- **Probe the gaps in customers' lives to uncover what they really want.** Start by finding out what your customers need right now and what they think they will need in the future. What you're looking for is information about people's lives and how they think their futures will unfold. The goal is to hypothesize about long-term trends, because it takes time to gather the resources necessary for developing the ideas, processes and products that will comprise your new overpromise.

- **Butt heads with conventional wisdom in search of overpromise opportunity.** In business, all sorts of assumptions and conventions must be challenged and examined for opportunity. You and your competitors may agree on the standards that determine, say, a product's composition, price or size. But each area represents an opportunity to develop an overpromise.

- **Look past your current target market and focus on a new group if opportunity beckons.** To spur inventive thinking about new markets, consider any customers whose attraction to the current product was a surprise, as well as those people whose interests you don't, and never tried to, understand. Then imagine what aspects of the product might prove valuable to each group and how they would use what is being offered.

- **Rigorously review your business model.** Be the pioneer, break the new ground, reinvent your business model by linking it with a dramatically new overpromise. Of course, that requires fresh thinking and a

willingness to embrace a change.

- **Keep it simple and watch a more substantial overpromise emerge.** Whether changing a specific product, a marketing approach or a supply chain, simplification can lead to a powerful overpromise.

Keeping things simple, whether it's a product or a business plan, means dispensing with distractions and confusions. It means getting to the point, focusing on what can deliver the best results. ●

PART TWO: OVERDELIVER

How Do You Optimize Your Product TouchPoints?

TouchPoints are points of contact between you and your customer that help you overdeliver on your overpromise.

Product TouchPoints can also be Service TouchPoints, so the term Product TouchPoints encompasses both. A service, after all, is a product — a product of your company's ingenuity, its systems and processes and especially of those employees who actually provide it. Most services today also include tangibles — a report of findings from a consulting firm, say, or an investment plan from a full-service broker, or a will from an attorney. But a few do not, such as a delivery service.

And Product TouchPoints include not only the actual product or service itself. TouchPoints also encompass product availability and ease of purchase. Product TouchPoints also cover information about the product, competitive offerings, packaging, shipping methods, financing options, warranties, parts-and-service availability, return policies, recyclability and so on.

Even though Product TouchPoints are where your company's overpromise comes to life, disconnects between products and promises are all too familiar: stain removers that don't work, weight-loss diets that add pounds, magazine articles that fall short of their cover headlines.

Another reason why Product TouchPoints deserve special attention is that they get people talking — for better or worse. In fact, personal experience with a brand and word of mouth are what drive revenue growth today. Indeed, they are not only the top two reasons why customers choose a brand, but they are also important marketing tools because they simply work faster, more effectively and less expensively than any other approach.

Three Lessons When Designing Product TouchPoints

Consider these three lessons when designing Product TouchPoints:

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

1. Make it easy. Today's customers have limited time and are under severe pressure to get a job done quickly. Speeding them along at the Product TouchPoint can keep them coming back.

2. Use technology in ways that truly matter to customers. Harness technology to deliver information to employees where and when they need it.

3. Playing it safe can be risky. Sometimes it is safer to make a new overpromise, to stand out with a Product TouchPoint that makes your company a unique, totally differentiated business. ●

How Do You Optimize Your System TouchPoints?

System TouchPoints are nonhuman interfaces — in other words, contacts between a company and its customers that don't involve direct interaction with the product or service it sells or its people. Think of the automated phone system through which subscribers can temporarily stop and restart newspaper delivery without ever speaking to a person; the E-ZPass (East Coast), I-Pass (Illinois), AutoPASS (Norway) and other toll collection systems used on numerous highways and bridges around the world; an ATM, kiosk or vending machine; or one-click ordering on Amazon.com. If customers come to your retail store or office to do business, these, too, are System TouchPoints.

Like all other TouchPoints, System TouchPoints are moments of truth for a business, an opportunity to fulfill its distinctive overpromise. Doing so successfully requires System Touchpoints to deliver simple, convenient and trouble-free transactions. Additionally, they must meet two important criteria: consistency and scalability. That is, they must be reliable and capable of accommodating additional demand as your market expands.

TouchPoints or TorturePoints?

Despite the clear potential of System TouchPoints as a tool for overdelivering on your overpromise, a caveat is in order: Such efforts can, and often do, go wrong. And when they backfire, they can turn a positive customer experience into a negative one, turning proponents of your brand into critics. In other words, System TouchPoints can become TorturePoints for customers. One sure sign of a TorturePoint is a system designed for the company's benefit, such as cost control, access control, inventory control or fraud prevention, rather than the customer's benefit, meaning ease of use.

Not every TouchPoint in your arsenal, and particularly not the System TouchPoints, needs to play a starring role. In fact, with System TouchPoints, you almost want them to disappear. For example, lighting is a critical System TouchPoint in a retail store, but you don't want your customers looking at fixtures. You want them looking at merchandise.

Resist the urge to make each and every System TouchPoint a "Wow!" Use your good judgment to determine which ones work best when they're little noticed or even completely invisible.

Three Lessons for Designing System TouchPoints

Here are three lessons for designing System TouchPoints:

1. Beat competitors that consistently fail to satisfy customers' basic expectations by designing System TouchPoints that enhance and support a unique overpromise. You will quickly dominate the market, at least until rivals can match your moves, by which time you should have raised the bar even higher.

2. Be prepared to change all associated processes substantially when you launch an unusually innovative System TouchPoint. A major new System TouchPoint can open the way for more.

3. Handle disruptive changes with care. When new System TouchPoints threaten to upset existing procedures, let them — but be sensitive to those most affected by the changes. ●

How Do You Optimize Your Human TouchPoints?

Despite its unpredictability, the Human TouchPoint remains essential to the ongoing mission of overdelivering on a brand overpromise, and people employed in the right ways can bring enormous value to a brand. Numerous occasions arise in which a customer needs a personal touch. When a situation is complicated or ambiguous, when patience, flexibility and initiative are required to hold on to a customer or win a new one, rely on front-line people to save the day. That's when the Human TouchPoint is the best solution, essential really, for overdelivering on a brand overpromise.

Beware of Overreliance on Human TouchPoints

It's true that Human TouchPoints are critical in virtually every business, but they do have their limits. Many organizations rely on their front-line people more than they should, which implies that other TouchPoints, par-

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

ticularly the System TouchPoint, aren't being optimized.

Look around your business. How much of what your people do must be done by individuals? In many companies, people regularly handle functions that could be consistently delivered more simply, effectively and less expensively in other ways. Doing so would free up employees to deliver far higher value to customers. Worse yet, they are consigning their company's fate to the vagaries of unpredictable relationships.

Recognizing the pros and cons of Human TouchPoints, you must assess where you stand. Have you assigned sufficient resources to support your salespeople and service representatives? Does your company's culture inspire them to achieve?

Three Tips for Designing Human TouchPoints

Here are three tips for designing Human TouchPoints to help fulfill your brand overpromises:

- 1. Prepare the script.** If you want your front-line people to behave in a particular manner — and surely you do — give them a script to follow. Make it as detailed as you think necessary, but err on the side of giving too much rather than too little information.
- 2. Hire to the script.** Any normally capable person can read the manual and follow directions. For your Human TouchPoint to reach its full potential, you need to hire and train people who will live your overpromise-aligned manual.
- 3. Train to the script.** Newcomers to the ranks of your front-line staff must be trained to master your manual for overdelivering. Your salespeople should also be indoctrinated in the spirit that informs the script and the brand overpromise — in other words, they must understand the context, not just the text. ●

A Case in TouchPoint: Lexus

Early on, flawless performance (a Product TouchPoint) and an unprecedented level of personal service (a Human TouchPoint) would be key elements of the Lexus brand promise.

Product TouchPoints, the Lexus Way

For customers, Lexus' first Product TouchPoint is the feeling you get when they slide into the driver's seat — the unspoken "aah" that comes with experiencing the height of luxury. That feeling is reinforced by a wealth of subtle details, ranging from buttery-soft leather seats and the rich gleam of the wood-trimmed interior to the Lexus' hushed, silky ride and smooth

How Lexus Creates a Great First Impression

To start customers off with the right impression, Lexus cues its Human TouchPoint from the top: Many new owners get a personal call from an employee at the company's U.S. headquarters in Torrance, Calif., welcoming the buyer to the Lexus family and making sure everything about the purchase has been satisfactory.

handling. All of these details are the product of never-ending questioning, research, testing and reworking. Nothing is too small to escape notice.

A sure sign of Lexus' unwavering commitment to quality came in the first months of production in 1988, when cars began arriving in California with noisy fan belts. Lexus stopped the line and shipped no cars from Japan until their belts were quiet.

System TouchPoints, the Lexus Way

From the beginning, Lexus designed its System TouchPoints to make sure customers had a flawless experience every time they interacted with the company, particularly when their cars needed servicing. Lexus' high-end European competitors were especially vulnerable when it came to service.

To exploit its rivals' weaknesses, Lexus management seized on a superior dealer network that turned out to be the carmaker's most important System TouchPoint. Parent company Toyota's reputation for quality drew hundreds of dealer applications when word spread that it was planning a luxury car. Lexus enticed even more dealers by offering unprecedented levels of support.

The dealerships themselves have been designed to convey solid luxury and to appeal strongly to the targeted buyers. Inspired by the serenity of Japanese gardens, Toyota designer Jim Sherburne came up with a distinctly untrendy design for a building with a stone facade above a smooth expanse of glass and a stone pillar at each end. To convey integrity and reliability, the look extends to all sides of the building. The size and style of lettering are restricted, and no banners or pendants like those found at many a car dealership are visible.

Human TouchPoint, the Lexus Way

As with most luxury products, the Human TouchPoint is crucial to Lexus' success. Human contact is inevitable in selling and servicing cars, and it has

Summary: OVERPROMISE AND OVERDELIVER

to be pleasant, courteous, attentive and responsive to a customer's every need if Lexus is to satisfy and retain its targeted buyers.

Every Lexus employee who comes into contact with customers — which means just about everyone — is instructed in the precepts of the Lexus Covenant. Sales associates are also required to attend the Lexus Promise class and earn formal certification before they are allowed on the showroom floor. And unlike sales associates at many luxury car dealers, they are trained to treat every potential customer in a courteous and helpful manner; there is no room for open skepticism about a person's wherewithal or a sarcastic attitude intended to make a customer feel grateful just to get a test drive. Instead, Lexus dealers and sales associates welcome potential customers as guests, and they go to great lengths to solve customer problems of every kind. ●

A Case in TouchPoint: Apple

A dedication to superlative design informs every corner of the Apple empire from its offices to its packaging, from its Web site to its products. Over the years, Apple CEO Steve Jobs has settled on the phrase “insanely great products” to describe his vision for Apple.

Product TouchPoint: Aligned to Deliver ‘Insanely Great Design’

The metamorphosis of Apple from also-ran to a breakaway leader began in 2001 when Jobs had the pleasure of introducing four major initiatives (three of them Product TouchPoints): iTunes, the iPod, the OS X computer operating system and the first Apple Store. It was a tour de force, an almost unimaginable feat that kicked off the company's invasion of the digital media world. OS X made life easier for Macintosh owners, and the Apple Stores would become a major revenue stream. But it was the combination of iTunes and iPod at the Product TouchPoint that would transform Apple's fortunes.

In each case, Jobs succeeded in overdelivering on an overpromise that differentiated Apple from the crowd — and doing so with a compelling Product TouchPoint.

System TouchPoints: A Portal to Another World

In creating its System TouchPoints — the retail stores and Web site leap to mind — Apple has once again overdelivered on its overpromise of insanely great design. Log onto Apple.com, and the word “cool” leaps from your lips. As for the Apple Stores, when you pass

through the portal of an Apple Store you feel as though you've entered a magical space. The atmosphere is like a modern museum — bright, airy, uncluttered, inviting. The products are sitting out on tables and dozens of people of every age and condition are trying them out, having fun with them. You can't resist joining them.

At the System TouchPoint, Apple sucks you in with one non-intimidating experience after another. You start fooling around with the iPod, then a new Mac, then you think you might want to make a movie or create a book — and suddenly you're through another portal into the iLife. Once again, Apple has managed to overdeliver on its overpromise of insanely great design.

Apple.com achieves the same end. There's a rare vividness, freshness and clarity about these pages. It's no mean trick to package dozens of products, hundreds of applications and hundreds of film and video offerings in so colorful yet elegant a fashion. Beyond that, you can see the effort that goes into the pages every day to connect the viewer with the world of Apple.

Human TouchPoints: A Touch of Genius

Apple's retail stores have been a triumph in terms of differentiating the brand at the Human TouchPoint.

There are two basic levels of employees at the stores. The specialists are the relative newcomers who wander about in their blue T-shirts answering visitors' questions and guiding them around the place. The geniuses are kings. They get to wear a black shirt, like Steve Jobs, and to sit at the Genius Bar where customers solicit their help with problems. It's a much better gig, with a high paycheck as well as greater status, but geniuses have to demonstrate their full knowledge of essentially everything about everything Mac. Specialists get to be geniuses by studying hard and showing their ability to get along with customers.

It's a great way of inspiring your front-line people to peak performance at the Human TouchPoint. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Overpromise and Overdeliver*, you'll also like:

1. ***Differentiate or Die* by Jack Trout with Steve Rivkin.** Differentiate your company in ways meaningful to customers and hard for competitors to copy. Jack Trout gives you essential tips to succeed.
2. ***How to Drive Your Competition Crazy* by Guy Kawasaki.** Kawasaki is a master at driving innovation and inspiring companies to think in a unique, customer-centric way. This is his guide to disrupting the market and gaining your place.
3. ***Exceeding Customer Expectations* by Kirk Kazanjian.** While providing key case studies, Kazanjian gives strategic management practices to boost your company to the top of its industry.