

Employee-based Marketing - The Human Touch for Marketing Services

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Ravi is going to deliver your food. Ravi is a football enthusiast and loves watching Messi play. He would want to travel the country with the money he can save. Zomato customers can see such messages and notifications where they get to know about the person who is going to deliver them their food. Zomato calls Ravi and many more like him, who deliver food to its customers – Delivery Partner. There are deep human and marketing insights that have led to the emergence of the 'Employee-based' marketing tactics, especially significant in case of services.

To get to the core of it, we must look at how services are different from products. Unlike products, services are intangible, i.e. you cannot physically touch and feel a service. For example, when you book an Uber, all you have purchased is service to be dropped from point A to point B, not the product, which in this case is the car. Once the service is availed the transaction is over. In the case of products, the transaction continues until the product is used by the customer. Thus, in case of services you do not have a tangible entity to convince the customer and win their trust. Also, since humans react to visual pieces more positively than anything else, services need something which they can show to give a visual entity for the customer to trust. Can these companies find something who'd do just that?

Let us keep that question parked for a moment. We'll get back to it in a while. Technology-based companies like Uber, Zomato, and Amazon have brought in tremendous ease for customers when it comes to simple tasks like ordering food, commuting from one point to another, and shopping. Food, taxi, and products now come to your doorsteps in a few clicks. However, with this convenience, there is a part of human behavior that is left ignored. The need for human touch. For example, with all the technology in place to direct and redirect your calls when you are calling a call center, isn't all you long for is a human voice who will talk to you so that you can tell her what is your problem? Humans, despite the technology-dependent lifestyle, crave human connection. A passing smile, a short greeting and someone to talk to in case there is an issue.

Unfortunately, technology-led automation has burnt those

bridges between these tech-ups (start-ups based on technology) and customers. Is there be a bleak possibility of bringing back the human touch with all that has been lost? The answer to both the questions posed is, yes!

It is not uncommon for people to receive a delivery package from Amazon which might have a picture of a person on it. I too did some time back. The box had a name – Storybox. My Storybox had a story about Mrs. Vijaya Rajan who is a seller with Amazon. She is referred to by Amazon as – Amazon Selling Partner. Interestingly, the image on the box is scan-able. When you scan the image with a scanner on your phone, it takes you to Amazon's web-page which has many more stories about its many more selling partners.



Figure 1: An Amazon StoryBox with the story of Mrs. Vijaya Rajan

Uber's digital ads started showing the life, struggle, and accomplishments of its drivers, who are of course called – Driving Partners. These ads are targeted at customers to look at Uber in a completely different light. Not a tech giant who muscles its way into countries finding loopholes in the system, but as a humane platform that allows its driving partners to make a life for themselves. With the help of the stories narrated by Uber in these ads, Uber gets a face. From

a cab-hailing giant, it suddenly becomes an Abdul, who is collecting money to help his parents build a bigger house back in his village by driving his Uber taxi or John who wants his daughter

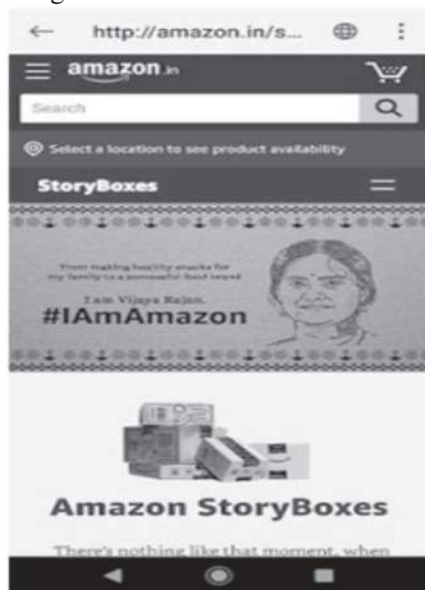


Figure 2: Amazon StoryBoxes webpage on the Amazon Website

to become a doctor. Thus, Uber not only gives a human touch to its otherwise technology-heavy functioning but also gives a visual entity to its customers which is 'tangible' and hence can be trusted and be associated with.

Similarly, Amazon is no more a business empire that is on track to engulf all small local businesses. It instead is Mrs. Vijaya Rajan and hundreds of those sellers whose stories are there on thousands and thousands of Storyboxes. Stories about selling partners who had humble beginnings and face a lot of challenges, but achieved what they did, with their sheer commitment and hardwork. And suddenly, Amazon has a face. A face that is different from that of a monopolistic giant, but of a small seller working hard to deliver you what you fancy while browsing on the Amazon app.

Likewise, Zomato is not anymore the business that has put a lot of restaurants owner under pressure with extensive competition albeit with a novel business idea. It suddenly is Ravi, who like many of Zomato's customers is a football enthusiast. Who wants to go traveling across the country, like many of us. And Suddenly Zomato has a visual entity and a human touch in Ravi, whom we can see, talk to, and trust with our food.

Employee-based marketing has always been practiced by Service Brands for the challenge of visually demonstrating

services before they are acquired, unlike product ("Here is an Audi Q3! for you, isn't it good?") makes more sense than "Here is your travel package, 'trust me' your tour is going to be good?"). Technology service companies, neither have a visual entity to put forward nor have a human touch that customers crave for. Employee-based marketing hence, not only helps these companies with a visual entity (though their employees or 'partners') but also gives the company a human face for its customers, which is easy to trust. So next time when you order food from Zomato, call for an Uber or order the newest electronic gadget from Amazon, you know you are dealing with Ravi, Abdul and Mrs. Vijaya Rajan.

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