

The Cachet Of Hospitality Is The Ultimate Brand - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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Folks, we've got it, and others want it. The term, Hospitality, evokes certain emotions and expectations, and we are the practitioners who make it work. We fulfill the dreams and deliver the goods. Hospitality is a most worthy cachet, and we cannot afford to lose that edge.

Cachet, you say. What does that actually mean? By definition, a cachet is a sign showing something which is genuine, authentic or of superior quality - a mark of distinction and prestige. In this age of Experience, that is exactly what we are relaying to our audience.

Sometimes, all you have to do is mention a name. Vermont, as a destination, appeals to your senses - bucolic, tidy, clapboard villages, green mountains and verdant valleys - how life should be, whereas Maine presents itself as a state of mind - independent, varied landscape, hardy souls, tasty crustaceans. In the Caribbean, Anguilla, BWI stands for white sand beaches, - pure, natural, a Paradise. Las Vegas, on the other hand, speaks to the naughty side - bright lights, gaudy tableau, flaunting some skin and some luck. All four are highly evocative, appealing to our emotions, senses and desire for adventure. Images planted, dreams launched!

Naturally, Big Business has clamored for the same type of cachet. For Ford Motor Company, Quality is Job One. Coke is the Real Thing. Bernie & Phyl's Furniture - 'quality, comfort and price - that's nice'. Tiffany is the gold standard, you simply are not chic without a Prada product, and Campbells Soup is 'umh, good'! Cachets can run amok, as well, with Starbucks the most recent example. As soon as major expansion began, the Company, which was selling the Experience rather than the coffee, began the erosion of its Brand. There is no cachet in a hotel lobby or distinction with expansion plans for a world-wide presence of 40,000 stores. You just become another cup of coffee. Even the CEO, Howard Schultz, knows he must recapture the 'soul' of the Brand and return the 'romance and theater' to Starbucks.

So, exactly what is Hospitality about, what are we selling, what is that special cachet? Firstly, we accommodate, feed and entertain the world. Each of us, no matter the role or the business type, knows instinctively in our heart that to perform successfully we must have product, service and facility in top form. We deal with the public - our Visitor, guest, or patron - the Consumer, just like us, who have expectations, for we have painted quite an appealing picture of what their Experience with us could be - our marketing dollars at work. Now, we need to deliver.

The ultimate Hospitality cachet is our delivery, often times, gracefully under fire. A warm smile and welcome, attending to needs, high service standards and execution, affirmation that the ongoing Experience is working, and a sincere thank you. This is all accomplished with a certain style, passion, respect and dedication. Simply, it is how we all wish to be treated in that perfect world.

In our trade, the realities always challenge that tri-pod of Hospitality: product, service and facility. We seek transparency and excellence, but frequently settle for less. Brand integrity is tricky business, and once you lose your cachet, you are toast, not even lightly buttered.

We spend an enormous amount of time and money attracting those Guests to our Destinations and venues. We are effusive with our promotional language, describing an Experience which simply may not exist. Most Destination Marketing Officials do not understand that their role does not end with the promotion, they need to direct the community enculturation and integration effort, too. Everyone is part of that effort, needs to be engaged, oriented and trained, and become essential to that Experience projected. Oregon has done an especially wonderful job at this, as has the Pocono Mountain Vacation Bureau. Others sprinkle a little money and half-hearted efforts to this enculturation aspect, wipe their hands and say they have done their part. Not good enough! The parts equal the sum of the Experience.

At the local level in our accommodations, restaurants, attractions, and retail stores, we try very hard. Many succeed with sparse resources. Excellence is an investment. It requires time and commitment. We share our passion and direction with our staff, who may not reflect either our standards or appreciation of the business. We do the best we can with little money, trying to attract talent, retaining our personnel through continuous training and development and competitive wages and benefits and, yes, respecting the differences. We strive to present the finest in product, ever mindful of our amenities, our food preparation and overall performance standards. With our facilities we know the power of First and Lasting Impressions - we continually renovate, innovate and enhance.

We are the cachet of Hospitality, we perpetuate that essence. For us, there is no mystique. We live it every day, this is what our Guests seek. Around the world, other businesses have discovered that Superb Customer Service is the only barometer for Performance success. Whether it be Health Care, retail operations, like banks and grocery stores, even big business and manufacturers like General Motors - the Customer is King. And, that Customer needs to be lavished, attended to, listened to, respected and thanked. For generations we have embraced authenticity and care for our Guests. We know what the Hospitality Experience should be. We know the ingredients, which make our calling distinctive. Be proud of the tradition!

The author, J. Ragsdale Hendrie, believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Guest Experience and offers solutions through www.hospitalityperformance.com.

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