



# Irritation, aggravation & frustration

The big stuff may win you customers but it is the little annoying things that will drive them away. Brian H Meredith explains.

**A** boy asks his father to explain the differences between irritation, aggravation and frustration.

Dad picks up the phone and dials a number at random.

When the phone is answered he asks, "Can I speak to Alf, please?"

"No! There's no one called Alf here." The person hangs up.

"That's irritation," says Dad.

He picks up the phone again, dials the same number and asks for Alf a second time.

"No – there's no one here called Alf. Go away. If you call again I shall telephone the police."

End of conversation.

"That's aggravation."

"Then what's 'frustration'?" asks his son.

The father picks up the phone and dials a third time:

"Hello, this is Alf. Have I received any phone calls?"

Personally, I think that irritation, aggravation and frustration are a progression and the above suggests the same.

What I am pretty sure of is that, however strong our brand franchise may be, each of these, if caused to customers, can be severely damaging in a way that I am not sure all businesses really grasp. And even where they do, intellectually, grasp it, I am less sure that they have the necessary plans, strategies and actions in place to minimise the risk of irritation, aggravation and frustration damaging their valuable brand franchises.

## Some examples

I am an admirer of the Air New Zealand organisation and its Brand. I believe the airline has achieved a significant turnaround in its performance and its fortunes in recent years. As a passenger, the overall experience of flying with Air New Zealand is palpably better

than it once was.

But if I have to listen to a string of dirge-like New Zealand music videos on boarding for too much longer I think I'll be heading for Qantas. If one only flies occasionally, it's perhaps not a problem. But if, like me, you take at least two flights a week, chances are you will know exactly what I mean.

And what are those "light snacks" about, currently being served during whatever the "Koru Hour" is supposed to be? "Today we are offering banana chips, veggie chips or a Kiwi lolly selection". Pardon?

These are no more than irritations. But the irritations grow into aggravations with frequency of exposure. Finally, the resultant frustration damages the relationship I have with the Air New Zealand brand.

I, perhaps unlike many others, am also an admirer of the TVNZ Brand. This is an organisation that in the more than three decades of its history has accomplished much that is world class. TVNZ has frequently not received the credit that is its due.

But such is the irritation factor of ludicrously high commercial content (there is a better way of doing this TVNZ – really), the excessive use of colloquial language and frequent and often spectacular mispronunciations of news and current affairs presenters, as well as the sometimes inexplicable programming decisions that they make, that my irritation has grown into aggravation, culminating in a sufficient level of frustration that I now actively seek to avoid consuming their product.

I have a leased apartment in Dunedin which is very comfortable and meets my needs admirably – all due credit to the landlords. But I have run out of ideas on how to get them to fix two faulty light fittings as well as a broken vacuum cleaner hose and am not at all sure why, on more than a couple of occasions, I have been woken from my slumbers by the loud ringing of the fire alarm and a powerful male voice ordering me to "Leave the building immediately by the nearest fire exit" – all for no apparent reasons.

Finally, I would cite all of those organisations whom I admire on any number of levels and with whom I have otherwise

strong brand relationships – but who risk them through:

Not answering my call (except by a microchip that attempts to reassure me that my call is important, even though they are going to ignore it for a considerable period of time).

Not returning my call (promptly or, indeed, ever).

Not responding to my emails (promptly or, indeed, ever).

Not spelling my name correctly on correspondence (flattered but fed up by being addressed as "Dear Brain").

Not understanding that if one or more of their people sound, on the telephone, like an intellectually challenged amoeba then their Brand will, ultimately enjoy the same kind of perceptual accomplishment.

Let marketing stick its nose into anything and everything. You will be glad you did.

If you are one who thinks that marketing has nothing to do with the operational aspects of your business and should concern itself only with sales and sales-related activities, then you are mistaken and at risk. Let marketing stick its nose into anything and everything. You will be glad you did.

Do sweat the small stuff. Do bring a marketing perspective to every tiny detail of everything that you do. Do understand that it might be the big stuff that wins customers but it is the irritations, aggravations and frustrations that mostly lose them.

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