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## Word of promise cast

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Opinions expressed by the Entrepreneur's collaborators are their own. The old cliché in business is that you owe your promise and excessive dedication. But in a crowded, unpromising market, it's a one-way ticket to oblivion. Because consumers and businesses are moving and buying at warp speed these days, they won't slow down enough to fully understand their promise. To get his attention, you have to promise too much. Promising too much, I don't mean you have to promise things you can't deliver. Instead, I want to say that you must make an outrageous statement about which you can comply. Most companies already have such capabilities, so their current customers do business with them. But your marketing teams haven't taken the time to understand exactly why your current customers actually stay loyal, and then articulate their unique capabilities into an outrageous excess of promise. While researching for my most recent book, Overpromise and Overdeliver: The Secrets of Unshakable Customer Loyalty (Portfolio), I was surprised by the number of products, services and companies that did not have an overly articulated promise. If you don't tell customers why they should buy you, but your competitors... then guess who gets the customers? Here are three great examples of excessive promises you can use to inspire yourself: American Girl over-promises offering dolls that will love them completely... and then over-delivers giving each doll a fascinating biography. Google promises over-promises by offering everything a customer would want to find on the web... and then over-delivers with an average search time of 0.2 seconds. Hummer promises a driving experience that's like nothing else... and then over-delivers with eye-catching design, extra comfort and a built-in Hummer community. So how can you create your own excessive promise? 1. Start by examining your vision for your business. Why did you start it in the first place? What was missing from the market that you swore to fix on behalf of your customers? I often find that the essence of a brand can be drawn from the original thoughts of a business founder. You could feel it even if you couldn't articulate it. Now it's time to do that joint. 2. What is the unique and most important attribute of your product or service? What makes it unique? What word do customers think or feel when they hear their company name? Volvo means safety. Lexus means luxury. What does your product mean? 3. Ask your customers why they buy their products. Then ask them why they don't buy your competitors' products. In the abyss between these two answers, you'll find a beacon pointing to what be your excessive promise. 4. Ask non-customers why they do not purchase their products or services. Then ask why they buy their competitors' products. This couple of questions will give you an idea of the wrong misperceptions have about your product or company, or it will point you towards serious deficiencies in your offerings. 5. What emotions do your customers feel when they use their products? Why do customers pay a premium for a Hummer, Lexus or American Girl Doll? It's because of the way it makes them feel or the way it makes others feel about them. These are powerful branding ideas to keep in mind when you're creating your excessive promise. Once you've done your research and brainstormed potential promises for your brand, be sure to test them with your customers and potential customers for efficiency in both their ability to capture attention and accurately reflect the brand's actual experience. Too many companies make the fatal mistake of creating excess aspirational promises that they cannot fulfill. It will take your customers a very short time to discover that they cannot keep their excessive promise. You'll know when you have the right over promise because it will resonate with both customers and employees. Now, over-deliver! My research showed a clear pattern in companies that were able to constantly over-deliver their excessive promises. They focused on creating unique customer experiences at three critical points: product, systems, and the human element. First, the product must work reliably as promised; the right design is crucial. Secondly, the product should be easy to acquire, finance, assemble, use, store, fix and dispose of, this is the system. The best product in the world is worth much less if getting it is a hassle or if it is too complicated for customers. Finally, your people, the human element, must clearly understand the role they play in delivering the overall customer experience. How should they dress? What should they say? How should they act? Don't leave these details to chance, or your people will make their own version of your brand. Excessive promise and over-delivery is a formula that has proven successful by American Express, Pottery Barn, Samsung, Washington Mutual and many other top-notch companies. If you are willing to invest in the research needed to get your promise over-correct and attention to detail needed to get your delivery over-correct, your brand, too, can join the ranks of the irresistible! Rick Barrera is president of Overpromise Inc., a consulting firm that designs and executes differentiating marketing strategies for companies of all sizes. Responsibility. Credibility. Authenticity. Those were the hallmarks of this exciting new business world: business done well. So... what happened? What happened to one of the ideas the notion that the customer is in charge? Remember the promise: You can keep it however you want, anytime, anywhere, anywhere, in any version. Remember the admonition to business leaders: You don't run your company, your Do. Promise of great time! Big warning! Deliver in no time! Something went wrong, so Charles Fishman embarked on a journey to the dark side of customer service. But wait, you promised . . . it is part of Fast Company's promise to answer to our community, to measure promises made and promises fulfilled (or broken) on the face of today's business. This promise is especially important in Act II of the new economy, a time when what is real is more important than is stated. Credibility is another facet of Act II, in this case, the kind of credibility that comes from the prescription of a practical, useful and powerful set of practices to deal with more difficult times. In Fast Company's most recent RealTime (in Phoenix last October), Jim Collins, one of the most compelling thought leaders in the business world, captured the lesson in a story he told about the Stockdale Paradox. Collins asked Admiral James Stockdale, who spent more than seven years as a prisoner of war at the dreaded Hanoi Hilton, who did not return from being a prisoner of war? Optimists, Stockdale said. The message: You have to look reality in the eye and face the harsh truth. How to recover from the setbacks and Masters of Disaster are designed to give unwavering advice to hard-minded business leaders who are committed to overcoming adversity. In fast company pages, Act II has to do with authenticity: real-world examples and people who embrace the possibilities of technology and new ideas to bring change to their lives. When it comes to real world and from bottom to earth, you can't get much more authentic than McDermitt, Nevada, The City That the Internet (Almost) forgot. Chuck Salter's report on the work of Pat Goff, a 33-year-old high school teacher who wants to go online and bring him to this city in '756, says it as it is: What happens when the Web arrives in a small town? High hopes. Big fears. Small changes. And maybe a better way of life. That's all anyone can promise. Not so long ago, Comstock, 46, ran marketing at General Electric; we have to thank you for ecomagination. He moved to GE's NBC Universal unit 18 months ago, and just got a new concert that combines commercial sales and digital media across the television network, cable channels and film studio. Do you want to stream Heroes, read the interactive novel and then bid online for works of art from the program? Thanks to Comstock for all that, too. The tv economy used to be simple. Do you understand how to make money today, when I can watch 30 Rock almost any time? We understand it much better what we used to do. Digital media allows us to open new windows without the caibization you would expect. So yes, we can offer 30 Rock in preview, then on the air, then streaming, then iTunes, then mobile, and then syndication. We've done the modeling. Modeling. Looks like we're going to make more money. How do advertisers count them with this new world? Some people know what they want, others less. But now, all sellers are doing digital, not because it's fashionable, but because they have to. Purchasing groups have created units called view, sound, and motion [to work between media]. They expect us to go to specific consumers: What do we know about them and how do we achieve them? How are viewing habits changing? We've had 60 million [TV show] broadcasts on NBC.com. Many of them are repeat spectators. Others are changing time. They're also changing places, with iTunes or on phones. And that works for you? It has to be like this. If consumers are in control, they're going to find out how they want to see. We have to find the right solution. What's next again? More personal expression [by viewers], the desire to participate in the narrative. Like, SMS-text to vote on a reality show, or watch Heroes and dial a phone number. These things are so rudimentary, let's look back one day and say, We were so cute then! All this implies a great cultural change. How are you coping with NBC Universal? This space is frantic and chaotic, and we are constantly trying to get out of our own way. With success, you become a little more confident. But we still need to be more focused and more disciplined. Do you go on, like you once said about yourself, you impatient bastard? Yes. And I'm afraid. I'm constantly scanning the landscape. What's next again? Who's going to get there first? This business is hypersensitive as well. You have to choose a path, stay on it, and feel good about it. The second-time ones will end up with more than ulcers. Ulcers.

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