Chapter Eleven
Marketing: Building Profitable Customer Connections

Video Case: Satisfying Customers at Flight 001

“We came up with this concept out of need,” says Brad John, co-founder of Flight 001. Brad and fellow co-founder John Sencion had, until the late 90s, worked in different aspects of the fashion industry in New York. John was a menswear designer and Brad worked behind the scenes. Both did an enormous amount of travel between the United States, Europe, and Japan. No matter how many times they set out on a trip, the days and hours before hopping a cab for JFK were spent running from office supply store to bookstore to drugstore to boutique in a mad rush for the latest laptop bag. By the time they got to the airport, they were sweaty, stressed, and miserable—not exactly the glamorous existence they envisioned when they got into the fashion industry.

On May 5, 1998, somewhere high in the sky between New York and Paris, they came up with an idea for a one-stop travel shop targeted at fashion-forward globetrotters like themselves.

Not everyone got it. “Everyone would say, ‘Well, there’s luggage stores, Brad, what’s the difference? You’re gonna sell luggage.’ ” Brad recalls. “We were going to sell guidebooks, cosmetics, bags, passport covers. There’s really no place in the world where you can buy all these items in one place.”

“You can’t just open another Mexican restaurant and think you’re an entrepreneur,” says Sencion. “Without innovation, there’s no entrepreneurship.” When it came to the design and concept, it was very important that Flight 001 not be just another luggage store. John lent his design experience and Brad brought his talent for selecting product and merchandising to create a truly unique shopping experience.

The stores, shaped like airplane fuselages, are chock full of fun mid-century modern design, harkening back to a time when leg room didn’t cost extra and when people dressed up to travel and actually looked forward to hanging out at the airport lounge. It’s not all in the look, of course. Customer service at Flight 001 is key to the experience. Friendly and helpful staff members do whatever they can to start your trip on the right foot. Unfortunately, whatever happens once your reach the airport is out of their hands.

Brad and John both know that a cool shop and nice people will only get you so far, so they put an enormous amount of thought into selecting and designing the products they sell. Looking back at the original inspiration for the store, Flight 001 created its own line of innovative space-saving packing bags called Space Pack. Each Space Pack is designed for a specific garment and, once filled, can double the amount of space in your suitcase with the added bonus of keeping everything neat, clean, and organized. Future plans include an exclusive luggage line; ultimately, Brad would like for every product in his store to be a Flight 001 branded product.

Another important part of Flight 001’s plan is careful marketing. While Brad and John are not going to turn away business, it is important to the brand that they maintain the feeling of a small
boutique, so they’ve never done any traditional paid advertising. Instead, they rely on partnerships with airlines such as Northwest and Song, editorial spreads in magazines from *Lucky* to *Business Week*, and exclusive product deals and tie-ins with high fashion designers such as Yves Behar and automaker MINI Cooper. Unlike traditional paid advertising, they are in front of only those consumers most likely to purchase their products. Plus, it’s free!

As Flight 001 celebrates its 10-year anniversary, it is clear that its success is based on more than a flashy design. With retail stores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago, it is clear that they aren’t targeting your average big-box shopper. At the same time, they appeal to anyone who wants to make a statement at the baggage carousel. Stop by the Greenwich Village store on any given day and you may find yourself comparing guidebooks with celebs such as Rachael Ray, meeting a retired couple shopping for lightweight ergonomic carry-on approved luggage, or seeing a preteen in search of the cutest iPod protector and a vial of anti-bacterial “Cootie Spray”—just in case. As John says, “We’re trying to bring a little fun and glamour back in to travel.”

Source: Textbook Instructor Resources