



Book Built to Love

Creating Products that Captivate Customers

Peter Boatwright and Jonathan Cagan
Berrett-Koehler, 2010
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Recommendation

Life might seem pretty empty without your Apple iPhone, Starbucks latte or Harley-Davidson motorcycle. There are good reasons for that. These iconic brands understand the value of emotions and design emotional connections into every aspect of their products, including delivery, packaging, website and design. Professors Peter Boatwright and Jonathan Cagan outline the link between positive consumer emotions and product profitability. They clarify the challenges of synthesizing emotion into products, and they present the “Product Emotion Strategy” to help businesses achieve this goal. They support their theories with dozens of case-in-point examples, including McDonald’s fast-food restaurants, Blue Hose plumbing supplies and LoneStar trucks. *BooksInShort* warmly recommends this book to executives, product designers and managers, engineers, and marketers.

Take-Aways

- Products that are “built to love” purposefully connect emotionally with consumers.
- Positive feelings about products produces repeat business and enhanced brand image.
- Product features – such as design, usability, color, and so forth – elicit emotion.
- High-emotion companies outperform firms that offer just quality products.
- Companies deliver emotions externally through “associated emotions” or internally via “supported emotions.”
- Associated emotions are “created autonomously of the features of a product” via channels such as advertising.
- The product itself inspires supported emotions.
- Every interaction between a customer and a product offers a “touchpoint,” an opportunity to connect.
- Compare your products’ “touchpoints” with other items purchased by your preferred customers.
- Once you’ve identified touchpoints, design them into your product.

Summary

Talking About Emotion

Every product category includes some items that people love. This rare, wonderful connection often occurs by happenstance rather than design. For the most part, people buy products because they fulfill a particular need or function. They might be good products or even the best available, but they don’t necessarily elicit positive emotions from the user.

“Emotion is fundamental to all that is human, including the products that we enjoy.”

“The difference between an ordinary product and a captivating product is emotion.” Rather than rely on a happy accident, your company should try from the outset to design products that connect emotionally with the consumer, engendering passion and loyalty. Such products are “built to love.” Many companies offer products and services that arouse strong feelings in their customers. For example, because Navistar’s LoneStar truck so effectively meets every need of long-haul truckers, many drivers sport tattoos of the LoneStar logo. People love their Apple iPods, KitchenAid toasters and waffle makers, BMW cars, or Webkinz stuffed animals. Each of these products fulfills a functional need while making customers feel good about using it.

“People buy products that make them feel better or safer or prouder.”

Companies focus on making emotional connections with consumers at the time of purchase. Those emotions, however, are fleeting. Products that stimulate an ongoing, positive experience provoke emotions in buyers that endure for the item’s lifetime. Consumers talk about those products to their friends and purchase them repeatedly. Because the Internet connects people around the world, such opinions from consumers often carry more weight than traditional advertising.

“People buy and pay for what they value, and everyone values emotion.”

When people feel good about a product, their emotions expand to include the brand. Then the brand must acknowledge, value and reinforce such feelings. However, many businesses focus almost exclusively on features and costs, ignoring the consumers’ experiences with the product. Savvy marketers can alter their strategy, expanding beyond product performance to anticipating and gratifying consumers’ emotional needs.

The Bottom Line

Product features – design, usability, color, and so forth – elicit emotion. Consider how a supple leather car seat, a hefty screwdriver or a hotel lobby’s plush carpeting make you feel. Yet, as valuable as these positive feelings are, they can be hard to quantify.

“The cost of emotions is merely the cost of thoughtful execution of product features.”

Products and services evoke emotions through visual prompts, crafted features, and thoughtful communication and interaction. Emotional value emerges from features companies usually develop anyway. Often, designing for color, shape and ease-of-use is no more expensive than creating something dull or cumbersome.

“The design of the product form should...involve thought, research and a deliberate emotional connection to the customer.”

McDonald’s and Starbucks provide relevant successful examples. McDonald’s excels at the efficient preparation and fast delivery of food. Children enjoy the play areas, toys and fun-to-eat meals, while adults appreciate the simplicity and ease. McDonald’s reinforces these positive feelings in every aspect of its design and delivery, down to easy-to-open hamburger wrappers. In its early years, Starbucks enjoyed incredible success without investing in national advertising by creating an atmosphere where people could hang out, a “third place” to be outside of work and home.

“In general, people seek out products that make them feel good, that get their tasks done easier or faster, and improve their personal well-being and attitude.”

Companies can inculcate “emotion through their...physical products, software, services and brand.” Firms that provide emotional value will reap the monetary rewards. An analysis of stock returns showed that high-emotion companies, such as Apple and Google, outperform companies that have quality products and services but neglect the emotional component. This holds true even in depressed economic times.

Ways to the Heart

You can connect to your consumers’ emotions through “supported emotions” (feelings inspired directly by the product) or “associated emotions” (feelings that “are created autonomously of the features of a product”). Advertising, for example, evokes associated emotions to introduce a new product, to build awareness or to motivate a purchase. Consider the Coca-Cola ad aired during the 2008 Super Bowl, which featured Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade balloons fighting over an inflated bottle of Coke. The ad never mentioned taste, price or availability. Its sole purpose was to inspire feelings of happiness, satisfaction, freedom and victory.

“Emotion must be embraced in the most in-touch consumer company as well as the most mundane B-to-B company, for emotion is human and its reach is vast.”

Associated emotions manifest independently of actual product experience. It can take time and a significant advertising investment to cement consumers’ mental associations. The advertising implies that the product will fulfill a promise. If the product follows through on its promise, the advertising claim is authentic; this blurs the line between associated emotions and supported emotions. However, if the product falls short, advertising only manipulates consumers’ emotions, causing disappointment and loss of trust.

“Touchpoints are the means to transform a product from mundane to exciting, from ordinary to emotionally satisfying.”

A product itself can inspire supported emotions. Companies that build emotion directly into their products enjoy higher profits, increased customer approval, and positive buzz on blogs and other word-of-mouth vehicles. These enterprises can spend less on marketing because the product speaks for itself. Businesses can engage with customers via their products’ features, design and service. Apple has a high level of emotional engagement with its customers and a fanatical following. Apple software is user friendly, and is easy to understand and implement. Apple showrooms promote interaction with the firm’s products in an open, friendly environment hosted by knowledgeable computer professionals. Apple’s website is accessible and visually pleasing. The company’s functional and enticing packaging supports the entire experience.

“To truly deliver on a promise that captivates customers is to deliver on emotions, allowing the right emotions to flow through and energize your market.”

Emotional engagement is not limited to retail. It matters as much to the business-to-business arena. You might expect plumbing supplies to be a purely functional commodity. Dormont Manufacturing makes Blue Hose, a flexible pipe used to connect an appliance with a gas source. The installer puts in the pipe, and consumers rarely see or think of it. However, contractors, designers and builders have emotional issues: safety and regulatory compliance. Blue Hose excels in both areas, engendering loyalty and an emotional connection with its customers. Thereby, it outperforms its competitors.

“Product Emotion Strategy”

Companies can design products with emotional engagement in mind by using the “Model of Creating Products that Captivate Customers.” This three-step framework is as follows:

1. **“Determine appropriate emotions”** – What kind of feelings does the product or company evoke?
2. **“Craft emotion strategy”** – How should your product evoke these feelings?
3. **“Translate strategy into emotion-based features”** – What “touchpoints (points of product interaction)” should your product possess?

“Every product that is carefully designed should have a consistent theme that promotes the emotion of the brand.”

Research indicates that specific emotional categories are germane to product creation. Developers of this model group these emotions into 16 categories: “Independent, Secure, Confident, Powerful, Passionate, Compassionate, Content, Optimistic, Joyful, Proud, Sensuous, Adventurous, Honorable, Luxurious, Connected” and “Distinct.” When formulating a “product emotion strategy,” companies identify which emotions they want to trigger. This requires a thorough understanding of their target customers’ inspirations, goals and needs.

“The best design will be one that engenders the desired emotions.”

The “eMap” (emotion map) tool helps designers develop their product’s emotional strategy. The eMap provides insights about a company, its brand and its products that management can use to design future products and services. The eMap employs a seven-point scale (from -3 to +3) to measure emotions, listing the 16 positive emotion categories down the left-hand side of a page, with their corresponding negative categories on the right. The eMap enables management to set strategy by analyzing the responses to the following five questions:

1. **“Define terms”** – What are the “product emotion categories”?
2. **“Current state”** – How does your current brand fare, and what is its competition?
3. **“Goal state”** – Considering all factors, what is your company’s desired category score?
4. **“Attributes”** – What are your company’s aspects, as measured by each category?
5. **“Synthesis”** – What product features are most stimulating and pertinent?

“Today’s marketplace is looking for an authentic relationship with its products.”

Every interaction between a customer and a product or service provides a touchpoint. For example, the visual aspect of a product can offer a powerful emotional connection. A product’s visual identity should reinforce its emotion strategy. Harley-Davidson motorcycles provide an excellent example of familiar design elements consistently supporting consumers’ emotional connection with the brand. Riders can easily identify a Harley-Davidson motorcycle by its “teardrop” fuel tank, round headlight, dipped elongated seat and wide fenders. Its visual identity evokes a set of desirable emotions: freedom, rebellion, independence and pride. As a result, Harley-Davidson customers are famously passionate about their motorcycles.

“The ultimate goal is to create emotions supported by the product and associated with a brand.”

The “Integrated Brand Identity Map” translates brands’ emotional goals into an understandable physical chart. List design elements down the left side of a page. List emotional goals across the top. Rank each brand you are analyzing in terms of how different design elements match various emotional objectives. To convey visual touchpoints, designers analyze how features and form influence emotional interactions. The process you would use to “translate emotion to touchpoint features” includes these four steps:

1. **“Identify touchpoint attributes”** – These create emotion. Compare your products’ touchpoints with other items purchased by your preferred customers.
2. **“Integrate”** – Once you’ve identified relevant touchpoints, design them into your product.
3. **“Test”** – Present the product to your desired customers, study their emotional responses and find out what they feel.
4. **“Iterate”** – Refine your product until customers respond with the emotions you seek.

Emotion Categories

Societal issues strike an emotional nerve and offer an important opportunity to connect with customers. Today’s consumers care about the environment, health care, social responsibility and globalization. Companies that consider these and other societal issues during their product development and as part of their marketing strategy will connect emotionally with their product’s constituency.

Nike developed “Nike Trash Talk,” a basketball shoe made entirely from manufacturing waste materials, such as rubber scraps. Wearers felt good about a shoe that supported sustainability and also performed well and looked cool. Users enjoyed working in partnership with Nike to address an environmental problem, and the shoe proved a financial success. Nike did well by doing good.

You might assume that highly technical products don’t evoke emotional reactions since they rely on logic and science. However, feelings such as optimism about a better future, adventure and even fear of the unknown affect consumer choices. Many health care companies are exploring ways to create an emotional connection to their consumers, such as by using music, massage, lighting and other atmospherics to ease stress and enhance the patient’s interaction with the health care system. Managers in other technology fields are also aware of the emotional component. For instance, the NASA Mars Exploration Rovers are vehicles that land on Mars and

will never interact with humans. Yet engineers designed them to be aesthetically pleasing and elegant rather than purely functional.

About the Authors

Peter Boatwright and **Jonathan Cagan** are principals at Carnegie Strategies LLC, an innovation and product strategy consultancy. They wrote *The Design of Things to Come* with Craig M. Vogel, with whom Cagan co-wrote *Creating Breakthrough Products*.
