

Corporate Mirrors: How Others See You

By Hugo R. Trux, IV

Most of us look at ourselves in the mirror at least once each day: Hair neat? Clothes straight? Makeup ok for ladies? No food between the teeth? We instinctively care about the impression we make.

But what about your business? Have you looked into the corporate mirror lately? Do you know how others see you? What are their impressions at your front door?

The physical front door: What's the customer's first impression when they enter your grounds or building? Is it clean; is it appealing? How are visitors greeted; how are they welcomed? What's the signage like? What message do you communicate in the lobby, or even in the parking lot?

I once visited a business that shared a building with a co-tenant. The building was divided equally in two, and each half had four parking spaces in front. The business on the right had four signs for its parking spaces, and each read: "Reserved for Customer." The business on the left, a government agency, also had four signs for their parking spaces, and they read: "Reserved for Director," "Reserved for Deputy Director," "Reserved for Assistant Deputy Director" and so on. Just these signs gave one a picture of the corporate

culture. One appears customer-centered; the other seems not to be.

Wal-Mart, among other retailers, always has a greeter--someone who hands you a cart, answers questions, and distributes fliers. They are invaluable for getting you started, and for setting a tone for your shopping experience. Compare that experience to a store where the entrance is cluttered, signage is sparse, a uniformed security guard stands lifeless, and staff is equally scarce.

Have you entered your parking lot and entry process with 'fresh eyes', the eyes of a customer? Take time to study your surroundings and see what you take for granted. What does a customer see? What does a first-time visitor see?

The telephone front door: Many businesses are never physically visited; their front door might be the telephone. Telephone reception work is very hard. Is the receptionist position staffed by someone with a lot of training, experience, and pleasant telephone personality? Or does a computer answer your telephone, and if so, how many steps does the caller need to take to get someone? Are they "overchoiced?" Do they get stuck in

"voice-mail hell?" Are waiting times excessive?

I have called one business that offers you an electronic directory and invites you to enter the name of the person you seek. Once the corresponding number is relayed, I enter that number only to be told that the number is not valid. Fed up, I push "0", and found myself disconnected. After the second try, I gave up.

We've all had bad, sometimes horrible, telephone experiences. High-level corporate executives need to call their public numbers and hear for themselves what the customer experiences. Then decide if you like what you hear, what you experience. Is your telephone "front door" sending the kind of signal that you intend to send?

The Internet front door: The third front door is via the Internet--often the medium of choice of many people to obtain corporate information and to make contact with the corporation. What does your web site say about you? Does your web site achieve your original goals? Do you even have goals for your website?

This month I visited a web site that had typographical errors on almost every

single page. The company is well known and regarded in its industry, yet its web site conveys a feeling of carelessness and "outdatedness". When I met with the owner, I gingerly approached the subject and was told that the website had been up for years, and most corporate staff never visit it.

I visited another company's web site prior to making a sales call. They even had a street map to their office. Using that map, I was almost late because the office had moved, and while the new address was posted on the website, the map directed you to their previous offices—someone forgot to update the map link!

Hugo Trux is a principal at Trux Marketing/Management Solutions, a marketing consultancy and outsourced management firm founded in 1980.

*Reach him at 614.736.8789
<http://www.trux.us/tmms.htm>*

© Trux Marketing/Management Solutions, 2004. All rights reserved.

When did you visit your web site last? Did you visit it with the eyes of a newcomer? Is it easy to use? Does every page and link work (sometimes a page won't come up because of a faulty link or sabotage by a web intruder or virus)? Is it easy to find contacts? Is it updated? Is it customer centered—does it work to fulfill your customer's needs? The IT staff *need* senior management input on the feel and goals of your website.

“You get used to it.” Many senior executives get into a routine, and they get used to their front doors. Worse yet, because of their deferential treatment

(private lots and entrances, secretaries, drivers, being well known, etc.) some are insulated and never experience what their customers experience. Hence they are unaware how their company appears to others.

Look into your corporate mirror. Experience your company from the visitor's, from the customer's, from the employee's, from the job applicant's, or from the patient's point of view. Do it often. Have other senior employees do it too. Get feedback from customers and visitors. Looking into your mirror will help you better manage.

Reprinted from: “Columbus Bar Briefs”, Columbus Bar Association, Winter, 2005, page 35
Similar article also published as: “Gazing into the Corporate Mirrors: How to See Your Business as Others See It” Columbus C.E.O., February 2005