

An MBA Minute

Bath Experiences

While on vacation, I visited the town of Bath in Northwestern England. It is the only hot springs in the British Isles. The springs weren't used much until the Roman invasion. The Romans loved to bathe. They built temples and other structures where vacationing centurions would go to relax and meet centurietts. After the Romans, the British Royalty discovered the medicinal waters. Now, people flock there to see the ruins.

It's amazing to think that this town of 80,000 people has had one and only one industry for the last 2,000 years – Tourism. You can't really count the Celtic period prior to the Romans. The Celts weren't too fond of bathing. 2,000 years of tourism has taught them many lessons in making money. After seeing the ruins, my wife and I were standing outside a Fudge Shop looking at the wares in a Charles Dickens style storefront when a girl in traditional dress walked up to the window and pulled a sign out from behind her that said "Free Samples" then smiled ever so "sweetly". This wasn't a sign that everyone got to see. It was for me! Rapturous sweet ecstasy. It was my personal invitation into transgression! Did we go in? Oh Man. At 280 lbs., I was on that like, well, a fat man on a free bar of fudge! She had read her target market and acted.

They sold 15 or so flavors. The girl made sure to let us try 2 or 3 pieces. Soon I was buying 3 bars of very expensive fudge. The girl said, "If you buy 5 you get to spin our fudge wheel." Fudge Wheel!? I've died and gone to heaven! It was a "Wheel of Fortune" kind of thing with 6 areas to win more fudge and one area about half the size of the others that said, "You've been fudged. Try again!" I felt like I was in Vegas. "Come on baby, Daddy needs a by-pass."

Generations of selling fudge had been focused in this sweet young lass and it had honed her into a dangerously sharp sales weapon. Over the last 2,000 years, the baths were never what was being sold. The entire community was selling an experience. The girl in the fudge shop could have worn jeans and a t-shirt, popped her bubble gum and read a magazine while waiting for fat Yankees to stroll in. But, like the rest of the town, she knew she was selling an experience, not fudge. Ask yourself, what experience am I selling? Every business from the kid selling worms on the road to the lake, right up to the biggest high-tech company, is selling an experience. What kind of experience does your customer want? How will you provide it? Dealing in experiences rather than just goods and services is one way to stand out from your competition. Give your customers some enjoyment. They'll be back and bring their friends. Maybe give out a little free fudge!

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